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of Ontario

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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 19 November 2013

Mardi 19 novembre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 19 November 2013

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mardi 19 novembre 2013

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

**EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS
AMENDMENT ACT
(LEAVES TO HELP FAMILIES), 2013
LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LES NORMES D'EMPLOI
(CONGÉS POUR AIDER LES FAMILLES)**

Mr. Naqvi moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 21, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of family caregiver, critically ill child care and crime-related child death or disappearance leaves of absence / *Projet de loi 21, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi en ce qui concerne le congé familial pour les aidants naturels, le congé pour soins à un enfant gravement malade et le congé en cas de décès ou de disparition d'un enfant dans des circonstances criminelles.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister moves third reading of Bill 21. Mr. Naqvi.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me. It's my great pleasure to rise for third reading of the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013. I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from Brampton West. It is a pleasure to speak to this proposed legislation because of what this bill can mean to Ontario families and their seriously ill loved ones.

I also want to thank several individual groups who are in the gallery today, or are arriving in the gallery as we speak—good morning and welcome to Queen's Park—for their commitment and support in helping this bill move forward. I want to mention and recognize them in the House and recognize their effort and hard work in support of this bill and bringing it to where it is today, and hopefully its passage through third reading in short order as well.

With us today we have Delia Sinclair, who is herself a caregiver and joining us today as the public policy and stakeholder relations coordinator for the Alzheimer's Society of Ontario; Vanessa Foran, the vice-president, public affairs and national programs for the Parkinson

Society and representing the Ontario Caregiver Coalition. Welcome. Joanne Di Nardo and Nicole McInerney, the senior manager and senior coordinator of public issues at the Canadian Cancer Society are with us today as well; and Abidah Lalani, the manager of government relations for the MS Society of Canada; Nicole Beben, VP of care and knowledge exchange at Saint Elizabeth; and Eleanor Leggat, vice-president, support services, on behalf of the ALS Society. I also believe Sue VanderBent, who is the executive director of the Ontario Home Care Association, is with us as well. Welcome, again, to Queen's Park and thank you very much for your commitment and dedication to looking after our loved ones, be it at home or in a home care setting, and also for convincing the government that this is an important bill that is going to provide relief for our families, especially those who need care at home, in particular, in our communities. I'm very happy that you're here for the third reading debate.

Speaker, this particular bill goes to the heart of what government should do. This legislation would help the working people of our province to be with their loved ones when they are needed most, at times of major health issues and in tragic situations involving children.

As important as the contents of Bill 21 are, the reason for introducing it is just as important, and that is: compassion. When our government introduced this bill, I had the pleasure of meeting the Munante family from Orléans in Ottawa. The member for Ottawa–Orléans joined me when we went to visit the Munante family. Gabriel, an amazing little seven-year-old, is bravely battling leukemia. Gabriel is affectionately known as Gabo, and just meeting him just puts a smile on your face. You can imagine a seven-year-old; they tend to be shy when they meet somebody new. A beautiful young boy, close to his parents—I don't know to what extent he is aware of the illness he's living through, but one can be confident that he knows what's going on, given the love and the care he has been receiving from his parents.

Patricia and Carlos, the parents, have been doing whatever it takes to be with him during his treatment. I remember Carlos, the dad, saying, "I know a lot of parents don't get that opportunity so this legislation is absolutely going to help them if they have to go through something like this. I can't imagine having to go to work those first four months at least when he was diagnosed. I think this is very important for families."

Now, Speaker, Carlos worked for the federal government and had accumulated enough leave to take time off when his son was diagnosed. Not all families can do that. Patricia, the mom, said to me, "We have seen some

families where ... if they're from out of town, one of the parents is unable to be with their child because they do need to work."

I know that every parent wants to be there, and the family caregiver leave would protect a parent's job while they are looking after their sick or injured loved one.

This bill is about giving families time to look after their loved ones without worrying about their jobs, because looking after a loved one should never put their jobs at risk. Anybody may need some type of job protection so that they are not caught in a situation where they are trying to balance out staying at home, looking after their loved ones or keeping their job.

That whole meeting, Speaker, with Patricia and Carlos and Gabo highlighted to me how important it is that we have legislation like this; how important it is that we ensure that parents, who love their children so much, have that opportunity to stay at home and focus on their child and nothing else: not work, no other things in life but their child, so that they can be with him or her to ensure that the child is growing, is strong and is able to fight any challenge that he or she may be facing.

That's definitely true for children, Speaker. I've got an 18-month-old son who I know, as a dad, I will do anything for. When my son, Rafi, was born, he faced some medical challenges as well. We, of course—my wife, Christine, and I—felt very lucky and fortunate to, one, have the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, CHEO, in our community very close to our home to ensure that Rafi is fine, that all his needs are met. Also, most importantly, besides having a great health care institution, the best doctors and nurses and all kinds of support workers being there for you at all times, which is extremely reassuring, especially for new parents, with the kind of anxiety one goes through, I also faced that reality for the very first time of not being selfish at all, not worrying about what my needs may be and being very singularly focused on the needs of my son Rafi. Whatever he needed, whatever time he needed, whatever attention, resources, I would have done anything, and I'm sure my wife as well, to get that to him.

0910

That, Speaker, really speaks to the heart of the issue. If we, the government, we, the legislators, can do even a small bit to help alleviate that anxiety that parents may feel towards their child because of whatever health-related circumstances, I think we've done our job. We can take that anxiety, especially when it comes to ensuring that parents can feel that one less thing they have to worry about is their job—if they can take time off and know their job is protected by law, that is a huge, huge pressure off parents so they can really focus on what matters most, and that is their child or children.

I think the same goes for parents, for your elders. We know that we live in an incredible time right now where our elders, our parents, our grandparents are living longer. This is an amazing thing, to have that family around you, to have that support around you. They're healthier, they live longer; they live vibrant lives. But that also

means they need more support. It also means they may need more care. We also know that our seniors now want to live at home. They don't want to be in a retirement residence. They don't want to be in a nursing home. They prefer not to be in a long-term-care facility either. If they can live at home and get care at home, that's where they thrive, that's where they have their independence, that's where they know their surroundings best. If we can create opportunities for we who want to look after our parents, to provide them some care, that's great.

My parents are getting older. I'm in that generation now that I see the health challenges coming to my parents as just a matter of age, even though they live healthy lives. You can see that the frequency of attention or care that they need is growing. That's something my siblings and I are constantly reminded of as we make plans: making sure that one of us is closer to mom and dad, in case. Our family is not unique. When I speak to my friends, they are going through exactly the same evolution in life, so to speak. We're all going through the same experiences. When you talk to them—once in a while I will actually talk about work with my friends—and when I talk about legislation like this, there's almost this unanimous support for a mechanism by which, if you have to take some time off to look after your mom or your dad, as we do, as we should, again you do not need to worry about your job: You have statutory protection that would allow you to take some time off and focus on your ailing parent.

Speaker, this bill is amazing in that respect: It's very practical. It doesn't really speak of some notion up there which many governments and we in this Legislature tend to talk about. This really, actually, in my experience, is one bill that has a direct impact on our lives, on the lives of our constituents. This is really one piece of legislation that does not need a lot of explaining when you're talking to your constituents, be it at the door or in your community office.

A few months ago, I very distinctly remember I was out in my community in Ottawa Centre, as I am on a weekly basis, going through one of the neighbourhoods, knocking on doors and asking my constituents if I could help them with anything. At one of the doors I went to, a man roughly my age opened the door. I asked the same thing; I introduced myself and said, "Is there anything I can help you with, any issues or concerns?" It was a cold day, actually, so it was earlier in the year. He said, "Come on inside." I went inside and he said, "You just brought some bill around getting job-protected leave." You really get this. You really get, at the door, somebody asking you a very precise question about a particular bill. People live busy lives and they have other priorities on their minds—rightly so. I said, "Yes, it's the family caregiver leave," and very quickly explained it. This guy, like I said, was my age, probably a good foot taller than me—

Mr. Bill Mauro: So still a pretty short guy.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: That's commentary on me, of course; my height. I appreciate that from the member.

Listen to this: He said that to me, and I explained it to him, and this man started crying. He started crying. He

had tears in his eyes because he said to me that his son faced a very significant health challenge. His son was there; I think he was roughly four years old, a beautiful little boy. He said to me, "I would have loved this piece of legislation four years ago, when my son was born." He said to me, "Kudos for doing something right. It's great that you're bringing this legislation." He apologized to me, of course, very quickly for being so emotional, and I said, "No apology needed. I guess it's good to hear that we're doing something here at Queen's Park that can help your life get better—not in your instance, but maybe somebody else's."

I only share this because I think it's powerful. It was powerful for me. I was overtaken by emotion when I left that home. It was a great sense of purpose for me. I think I was very new at my job as the Minister of Labour at that time. It was the first piece of legislation that I introduced as a minister for this government. Just to get that very direct feedback from a constituent—very personal—made me realize how important this bill is. It really made me think how directly this impacts our lives. You don't need some complicated, convoluted explanation as to how this is good for Ontario. This is straightforward. This helps families. This is very much about compassion.

The leaves-to-help-families legislation, if passed, would create family caregiver leave which would provide up to eight weeks of unpaid job-protected leave so that employees can care for family members who have a serious medical condition. An employee could take up to eight weeks of family caregiver leave per year per family member. A family member for whom an employee could request unpaid time off to provide care or support would include the employee's spouse; a parent, step-parent or foster parent of the employee or the employee's spouse; a child, stepchild or foster child of the employee or the employee's spouse; a grandparent, step-grandparent, grandchild or step-grandchild of the employee or the employee's spouse; the spouse of a child of the employee; the employee's brother or sister or a relative of the employee who is dependent on the employee for care or assistance.

0920

Our proposed leaves-to-help-families legislation would also entitle eligible parents to a critically ill child care leave, which would provide up to 37 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to provide care to a critically ill child if they have been employed by their employer for at least six months. This could provide incalculable human assistance to parents and children facing such a crisis.

In addition, this bill will show compassion by creating crime-related child death or disappearance leave. This leave would provide up to 52 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for parents of a missing child where the disappearance is likely due to a crime. It would also provide up to 104 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for parents of a child who has died where the death is probably the result of a crime.

The hard-working people of Ontario and those who depend on them deserve nothing less than this. The same

spirit of compassion that inspired this bill also led our government to introduce family medical leave back in 2004. Family medical leave provides unpaid, job-protected leave for employees when a family member is facing a terminal condition. Our proposed family caregiver leave would apply in cases of a serious medical condition, even when there is no significant risk of imminent death. Our proposed family caregiver leave would be in addition to family medical leave. This means that if you are caring for a loved one under the proposed family caregiver leave and their condition becomes terminal, you would also be entitled to family medical leave.

Our province also provides personal emergency leave. This leave can be taken for a personal illness, injury or medical emergency of an employee, or the death, illness, injury or medical emergency of, or matter concerning, certain family members and relatives who are dependent on you for care and assistance. Personal emergency leave is an unpaid, job-protected leave that allows you to take up to 10 days per calendar year away from work in workplaces of 50 or more employees.

Every member of this House and all those who are listening today to these proceedings share a common human experience: We're either sons or daughters. We have parents and grandparents, and we may have spouses and children. In short, we are all part of a family. So when those family members have major health problems, we want to be there because we care. We all know that there are many things the members of this House may debate and have varied opinions on, but the need for care and compassion for our loved ones, when they face a medical crisis, is not an issue that divides us but unites us as a House and as a province.

This is an issue on which we are, in every sense, one Ontario, and that is because everyone here today, or who may be watching these proceedings on television, knows that when our loved ones face a major health problem, we need to be there at their side. There's just nothing more important than that. Our families, those we are closest to, need us close when serious health issues occur. It is when we face a major medical problem that we realize just how dependent we are on those who care for us. It is when our family members have major health issues and our children face a crisis that we realize just how dependent they are on us. They're vulnerable, and our legislation seeks to help them by helping the working people who will care for seriously ill family members.

At these times, when we are faced with the health problems of those we love, our concentration and concerns are not on our day-to-day work but on caring for and working to restore those we love to health. We all know time stands still when our loved ones face such crises, and at these times nothing else matters—certainly not that voice mail at work or that deadline we thought required our full attention—because at these times, our hearts and minds are elsewhere, with those we love who are ill and may be suffering.

Our legislation, if passed, would give the working people of this province the right to take care of their

loved ones during very difficult times without having to worry about losing their jobs. Nothing can be more fair and compassionate in such times of need. Our bill would allow working Ontarians the one thing they need most when it comes to caring for seriously ill or injured family members: time to be with their loved ones.

That time of need could be the result of a heart attack or cancer or a car accident. Such a time of family crisis can also come when a child is rushed to hospital or, tragically, when a child is missing or dies as a result of a crime. This bill is for the young families or single parent who needs to care for their children in hospital with a serious condition; it is for the husband seeing his wife through a difficult period of chemotherapy; it is for someone helping to care for an elderly parent recovering from a broken hip. In short, it is for all of us when we need it.

Our legislation, if passed, would protect both full- and part-time employees and even those on temporary contract, and it would help protect their families. I think we can all probably speak of personal circumstances where we may have had to take time off in order to look after a loved one, someone who is close to us, who is a member of our family and had to face some sort of serious medical condition, and therefore had to take the time off.

I think what the challenge really becomes is this: Should we have to make a choice between looking after a loved one in their prolonged need of care or worry about our job, whether it's protected or not? This legislation tries to reconcile those two realities that many Ontarians face on a regular basis.

As those in this House know, we have asked our federal counterparts to provide employment insurance entitlement for those who qualify for family caregiver leave under this bill who are caring for family members with a serious medical condition, just as they do under our family medical leave. We want, and have asked, the federal government to enter into a partnership with us on this so that these caregivers will also have the income security they need and deserve.

If passed, this legislation would give the province's working people time: time to care for their seriously ill elderly parent; time to be with their hospitalized child; time to be with their spouse who has had a stroke or heart attack. Because all Ontarians are part of a family, we know that both employers and employees alike can face these difficult situations and personal crises when loved ones need care. The need for this legislation is clear and becomes all the more obvious when serious medical problems afflict our loved ones.

The reason we have brought this bill forward and worked with all parties in committee to make it a reality is most obvious when we pick up the telephone and it is difficult news about the health of someone close to us. The need and reason behind this proposed legislation is all too familiar to anyone who has ever personally faced the challenge of balancing work with family members who are struggling with major health problems.

There was a time when our world and our society moved at a slower pace, but as we all know, the world

has changed. We are sometimes called the sandwich generation—I was speaking to that a little earlier—a generation of busy parents who are often both working and trying to care for children while, at the same time, often facing the challenge of caring for aging parents or one another when serious health problems arise.

0930

It is times like these that we realize just how important, how critical, it is to have our jobs, our livelihoods, protected when loved ones with major health issues need us most. It is then that we realize our human limitations: in dealing with a family crisis that may involve children and may require 100% of our time.

No one in these situations should have the additional burden of worrying about whether they can take some time off to deal with these personal family medical crises. But without the security of knowing our jobs are protected, and in a way we can count on, sometimes those who need us can be afraid for us and not want to ask for help, not wanting to jeopardize our job, our livelihood, that they may depend upon as much as we do.

Our loved ones can be very legitimately concerned that they are taking us away from our jobs, even jeopardizing them. For the family—the husbands and wives and, at times especially, the parents—of working Ontarians, this reluctance to reach out and ask for help can come from the knowledge that their spouse or child does not currently have the job protection they need, because they may fear that a request for help could cost their loved one their job. That is why, Speaker, we are proposing this legislation.

But there are, as well, other compelling and pressing reasons. That is why I'd like to speak about Ontarians who need to care for their seriously ill and aging parents. We all know that in our society, we have an aging population. We're going to have 43% more seniors a decade from now and twice as many seniors 20 years from now, and that is definitely a good thing. I'm sure all those in this House hope to be among them eventually.

But we also know that as people age, they need more care. It is at those times of health crises, when serious medical conditions—like a broken hip or a stroke—occur, that our human need is also critical. Our deserving seniors, our aging parents, naturally want to be at home as long as they can be. One day, we will likely feel the same.

We know that care by family members helps to ensure their ability to remain where they want to be: in their own homes, where they are most comfortable and feel more secure. At home, there is less expense for our health care system and less pressure on needed health services.

Our government, Speaker, through the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Deb Matthews, launched a care strategy to help seniors remain healthy and to provide better quality care in the home, where they desire to be. As both the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and the minister responsible for seniors have said, our proposed family caregiver leave will support our government's Seniors Strategy. This strategy recognizes that

providing good care at home allows our older Ontarians to remain where they want to be while, at the same time, relieving the stress on our hospital and long-term-care system.

This is a very important step forward, Speaker, but to take this step, family caregivers have to be able to be there, and our proposed family caregiver leave recognizes this vital role family members play in our health care system. To provide that care, to fulfill that role, the working people of Ontario need to know that their jobs are protected and will be there while they are looking after their loved ones.

A young woman who knows this from personal experience is Marcella Robless. Her experience is touching and compelling. I would like to read from remarks she made on the day that this legislation was introduced. She said, "I took care of my mom for about three years. I am the sole caregiver for her. I've been in Canada now for about 28 years. The only family that I have now is my brother who is in Montreal and my mother who lives with me. We're not fortunate to have a lot of relatives so all of the pressure and her care is on me. Two years of the three that I've been taking care of my mother I was in a full-time job. I don't know how I did it, but I managed to do both things.

"Those very same two years were the worst years for my mother. She was on radiation, had chemotherapy and surgery ... but what I have to say is that care-giving is not just bringing them to the appointments or bringing them to CT scans and MRIs—being a caregiver is also being there in the middle of the night, being there all the time. We don't have a break; you can't tell a disease or injury, 'Okay, I need a few days off and then I'll be back and take care of you.' So I really hope that you will support this bill.

"As caregivers we are not invincible, and we need support. I definitely need to feel, if I get a full-time job and my mother winds up being eligible for surgery, I can be there for her and not worry about it."

This touching human account resonates with many of us who have aging parents or other loved ones with a serious medical condition, and at the same time are trying to juggle their work responsibilities. These words of Ms. Robless truly put a human face on the need for this legislation, and needing time like this can be difficult for the working people of our province when they don't have the security of knowing their employment, their means of providing for themselves and their family, is protected and is in fact secure. This bill could change that.

In those situations where parents are faced with a critically ill child, their attention and time must be focused on the family.

Our bill is for hard-working Ontarians struggling to balance their jobs and their care commitments.

In those most difficult, most trying and most tragic of situations where parents face the disappearance of a child or the death of a child as a probable result of crime, our proposed legislation reaches out and compassionately provides job-protected leaves for those who face these

painful times of personal crisis. No one should have to worry about being unemployed on top of struggling to deal with a medical crisis of a beloved family member or tragic situations involving our children. Because when hardship and tragedy strike, when the chips are down, you want to know that someone is there for you, that someone is watching your back.

This is an opportunity for government to show the compassion our citizens need and deserve in their time of need. This is the compassionate choice and the smart choice. Caregivers can suffer from incredible stress themselves. Many are taking care of both the children who have always needed them and the parents who have given them so much and now need their children's help. We need to help them by taking away the possibility that their job could be at risk for doing the right thing and putting family first. It is our way of telling Ontarians that we care like you care, that we'll help safeguard your means of making a living while you are fulfilling your obligation to your loved ones.

If passed, our proposed legislation would assist working people and the economy in other ways as well, because it will help protect and retain needed employees who might otherwise have to leave their employment or who might lose it. We know that keeping skilled labour is good for employers, employees and the overall Ontario economy alike. We know that skilled labour helps keep our province competitive, and that's important, especially in these times. Job-protected leave during periods of crisis is one thing we can do to keep our skilled labour force on the job. Whether in the high-tech or the construction industry, skilled employees are one of the important keys to a prosperous future for Ontario. Without the right skilled employees to do the job, the job will be done elsewhere, perhaps outside of our province. Keeping skilled workers here when they encounter the same family health crises we all face is a matter, then, of keeping our Ontario economy strong and secure. So it would make good economic sense to provide this caregiver leave, rather than see these skilled employees leave their employers.

0940

Speaker, I am confident that our proposed leaves are in the best interests of both workers and businesses, because we know that safe and fair workplaces are the building blocks of stronger communities and a stronger economy. Employers and business owners have families of their own, and Ontario business leaders know and can identify with their employees when a family member is sick or injured. In those cases, all these differences melt away and we are simply people looking after other people.

We are one Ontario. I really hope that we legislators, duly elected by the people of Ontario, as we debate this legislation, remember those stories in our communities, and I'm sure every single one of us may have a personal story or that of a member of our community. Perhaps we should remember all those stories as we debate this bill.

I really want to take this opportunity to thank all the members for supporting this bill. It has been a construct-

ive debate, it has been a good committee process, and I'm grateful to all members for supporting this bill. But I also ask them, as we wind down this legislative session—I think we've got three more weeks to go before we break for Christmas and the holidays—that it will be very much appreciated by our friends, our supporters who are here today, who I have met, who have told me how urgent the need is for this bill to pass for, most importantly, our family members in our communities, the parents, the children who need this job protection.

I really hope that we keep this debate and this legislation focused and see if we can get quick passage of this bill. I think we all will be doing the right thing. We all will be winners if this legislation becomes law by the end of the year. We will be doing what our constituents have asked us to do. We will be ensuring that much-needed, compassionate legislation is now law in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, I thank you very much for the time you've given me. I would now like to turn it over to my parliamentary assistant, the member from Brampton West.

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

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Thank you to the minister for his remarks. Before I begin today, I'd like to thank all the people in the gallery for their advocacy and support, and especially for coming before the committee process and bringing your views and making them known to the committee. They were very much appreciated.

This bill is about making sure family members have the time they need to look after their loved ones and that their job is waiting for them when they return. Importantly, for many in our province, the proposed family caregiver leave would be taken to care for family members who live in other countries. The difficulty of arranging travel outside of Canada, and the added time this travel requires, can be an added burden for those trying to help seriously ill loved ones.

We know that many Ontarians were born outside of Canada. In the greater Toronto area, many of the people were born outside of Canada; that percentage is about half. The importance of having job-protected time to take care of family members with a serious medical condition is all the more important when distance, sometimes continents, separates us from those we care about and need to be with.

We have seen overwhelming support for this bill from families, from caregivers and from organizations across Ontario. Canadian Cancer Society vice-president Rowena Pinto said, "Bill 21 is welcome news for those who need to take leave from work to care for a loved one with cancer.... This legislation will allow families to concentrate on supporting their loved ones instead of worrying about losing their jobs." Ms. Pinto also explained that, "Cancer is more than a health issue. It is also a complex social issue. With approximately 22% of Canadians grappling with caregiving responsibilities for seriously ill family members, the physical, emotional and financial burden on caregivers is a veritable strain on many fam-

ilies." Madam Speaker, that is why we introduced this important proposed legislation.

We have received other supportive words of encouragement regarding this legislation. Ms. Sue VanderBent, executive director of the Ontario Home Care Association, has said, "Home care systems are dependent on the support of families and loved ones. For many, the caregiving responsibilities are intense, emotional and lengthy in duration, and the demands can result in absence from work. The Leaves to Help Families will provide family caregivers with peace of mind related to their employment. The members of the Ontario Home Care Association are hopeful that all parties will move quickly to pass this legislation."

Emanuel Carvalho, executive vice-president of health care for the Service Employees International Union said, "This legislation will provide urgently needed relief to overstretched families who are caring for a loved one while juggling responsibilities like work and raising children."

Mary Lewis, the executive director of mission of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario has said, "We are very pleased to support the Ontario government's proposed legislation, the Employment Standards Amendment Act (Leaves to Help Families), 2013, and congratulate the government on taking this important step to protect the job security of Ontarians caring for loved ones. The Heart and Stroke Foundation recognizes that the health and support of caregivers is a vital aspect in a person's recovery from heart disease and stroke. We look forward to working together to further support caregivers through our health and information programs, like Living with Heart Disease and Living with Stroke, in order to give Ontarians much-needed support when filling this role after a tragic event."

Lisa Levin, chair of the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, said in supporting this bill: "The Ontario Caregiver Coalition, a collaborative that works to advance the interests of caregivers, is pleased that our decision-makers are recognizing the important contributions made by caregivers. Based on national data, it is estimated that caregiving contributes between \$24 billion and \$31 billion annually to maintain the health of Canadians. Caregivers need our support to continue their critical role. This is the beginning of a broader dialogue on economic and social supports to help those who take care of their loved ones."

That is why the leaves in our bill—leaves for parents of critically ill children and of children who are missing or die where it is probably the result of a crime—are so important and so necessary. The leaves complement recently extended federal income supports by providing up to 37 weeks of job-protected leave to care for a critically ill child; up to 52 weeks of job-protected leave for employees who are parents of a child who has disappeared where it is probably the result of crime; and up to 104 weeks of job-protected leave for employees who are parents of a child who has died where it is probably the result of a crime.

Employees eligible for critically ill child care leave may also be entitled to federal employment insurance

benefits for most of their leave, while employees eligible for a crime-related child death or disappearance leave may be entitled to the Federal Income Support for Parents of Murdered or Missing Children grant. All parents can sympathize with other mothers and fathers who face these difficult and tragic situations.

Ontario currently provides a number of supports to parents who face crises. Ontario Victim Services, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, provides direct services to victims of crime across Ontario and funds community organizations that deliver support services to victims. The direct services include the Financial Assistance for Families of Homicide Victims Program. The Financial Assistance for Families of Homicide Victims Program helps eligible parents, whether biological or adoptive, and spouses of homicide victims by providing up to \$10,000 per homicide.

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The Vulnerable Victims and Family Fund helps victims of crime and families of homicide victims participate more fully in the criminal court process. Financial and court-based supports include helping both victims of crime and families of homicide victims to travel to attend court during key points in a criminal proceeding—for instance, a trial—and providing vulnerable victims with interpretive services when they're observing a criminal proceeding. Victims of crime and families of homicide victims would apply through Ontario's Victim/Witness Assistance Program, which is available in all 54 court jurisdictions.

Ontario also provides a variety of supportive services to parents of children who face a health crisis. The Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities program, which is managed by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, helps parents with some of the extra costs of caring for a child who has a severe disability. A parent or a legal guardian whose child is under 18 years of age, lives at home and has a severe disability may be eligible to receive help under this program, depending on the family's income. Parents can get between \$25 and \$440 a month to help with costs such as travel to doctors and hospitals, special shoes and clothes, parental relief, wheelchair repairs, assistive devices, hearing aids, hearing aid batteries, prescription drugs, dental care and eyeglasses.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services funds two programs that can give families a break or respite from the day-to-day care of their child with special needs. Under the Out-of-Home Respite Program, families of children with multiple special needs can receive up to seven days of respite care provided in a location other than their home. The child must be under 18 years of age, have multiple special needs because of a physical or developmental disability, and live at home and need care 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

There is also enhanced respite funding. This grant is paid to families who are caring for a child who is medically fragile and/or depends on a technological device, needing care 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and is paid

in addition to other respite services. Families may be eligible for up to \$3,500 per child per year. The child must be under 18 years of age, live at home and need intensive care and constant monitoring on a 24-hour basis.

Our bill is for hard-working Ontarians struggling to balance their jobs and their care commitments. In the most difficult, most trying and most tragic of situations, where parents face the disappearance of a child or the death of a child as a probable result of crime, our proposed legislation reaches out and compassionately provides job-protected leave for those who face the painful times of personal crisis.

No one should have to worry about being unemployed on top of struggling to deal with the medical crisis of a beloved family member or a tragic situation involving our children, because when hardship and tragedy strike, when the chips are down, you want to know that someone is there for you, that someone is watching your back. This is an opportunity for government to show the compassion our citizens need and deserve in their time of need.

If passed, our legislation would assist working people and the economy in other ways as well, because it would help protect and retain needed employees who might otherwise have to leave their employment or who might lose it. We know that keeping skilled labour is good for employers, employees and the overall economy alike.

The Ontario Ministry of Finance projects a shortfall of employees ranging from 200,000 to 1.8 million by 2031. This is according to a study entitled *People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People*, by former Seneca College president Dr. Rick Miner.

Our government, Madam Speaker, has worked very hard to protect working Ontarians and families. Our Premier, Kathleen Wynne, and members of her cabinet have visited communities across the province, met with important partners inside and outside of government, and introduced a number of new initiatives and investments to get government working for the people of this province.

More than 475,000 jobs have been created since the recessionary low in 2009. Our province has invested more than \$85 billion in public infrastructure since 2003 to reverse the underinvestment that had accumulated over several previous decades. There are more than 100 hospital construction projects currently on the go, including in Thunder Bay, London and Cornwall. There are also more than 610 new schools that have been opened, planned or under construction across the province. Our finance minister, Charles Sousa, said in his recent economic statement that now is the right time to invest \$35 billion over the next three years in important infrastructure projects throughout the province and that these investments will help support and maintain more than 100,000 jobs annually.

We're investing in our infrastructure and we're also investing in the people of Ontario. This includes: 30% off the tuition grant for post-secondary education, which is helping more than 200,000 students; the youth jobs strategy, which will create 30,000 employment and mentorship opportunities for young people—since its launch just

over a month ago, 2,000 jobs have been created; and the first-ever grant program solely dedicated to seniors, which will help older Ontarians remain active, healthy and connected to the community.

To make the province more competitive and create jobs, our government is investing more than \$35 billion in infrastructure over the next three years. This will benefit all Ontarians in the near term and for generations to come, helping businesses compete and attract new job-creating investment to the province.

The government's plan to build modern infrastructure includes: becoming the first province to develop and market green bonds, helping fund green infrastructure projects, including public transit; the creation of a new Trillium Trust, a dedicated fund that would receive gains from asset sales, such as from the sale of the province's interest in General Motors, to finance key public infrastructure priorities; and ensuring opportunities for companies of various sizes to take part in projects led by Infrastructure Ontario through its world-leading alternative financing and procurement model.

The Ministry of Labour currently has a panel reviewing the minimum wage to help determine a method of setting it in the future so that it provides fairness and a meaningful opportunity to improve lives and provides predictability for business to help them remain competitive and create jobs.

And to build a fair, compassionate society, our government has introduced this legislation that would, if passed, create these three new categories of unpaid job-protected leave: family caregiver leave, a leave for parents of critically ill children, and a leave for parents of children who are missing or who died as a probable result of crime. We've introduced this bill so people can take care of their loved ones without fear of losing their employment. Our proposed legislation would provide reasonable protection for employers and employees alike. We have asked our federal counterparts to provide employment assistance to those who would be eligible for the family caregiver leave so that they could receive income during these difficult times.

If passed, this proposed legislation would be enforced by Ministry of Labour employment standards officers, who could step in if employees' rights are denied. I want to add that the strategies, tools and resources that we have over the past few years developed to successfully deal with employment standards claims give us an enhanced ability to enforce this proposed legislation, as well as other provisions of the Employment Standards Act.

This bill is for the young working family or single parent needing to care for their child in hospital with a serious medical condition. It is for the wife seeing her husband through a difficult period of radiation or chemotherapy. It is for someone helping to care for that elderly parent who is suffering major health problems as a result of a fall or the aftermath of a stroke.

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This proposed legislation is our way of saying to the people of this province that we will help protect you as

you protect your loved ones. Our proposed legislation would assist those Ontarians who are most vulnerable. That is because the burden of caregiving lies most heavily on those without the financial means to provide care. Our bill would help the immigrant family new to Canada already burdened with adapting to a new land. It would help single parents. It would assist single adult children caring for a seriously ill and elderly parent. It would also assist women, to whom, we all know, a disproportionate share of the responsibility of caring for family members still falls.

When we and those we love face these very difficult personal situations, the last thing we need is to fear being left unemployed because we need time away from work. Working Ontarians should not have to choose between their jobs and helping family members with major health problems. This is why our government introduced this bill. That is why we have taken this action for the working people of this province.

Another goal of our government, which I'm sure we all share, is to make Ontario the healthiest place in North America, both to grow up and to grow old in. We all know that across Canada we have an aging population. It is clear that this puts economic pressure on our health care system. So when the opportunity is there to help seniors facing a serious medical condition stay in their homes, where the financial cost to society is lower, we believe making that happen makes sense.

In conclusion, I just want to thank all three parties of the House for supporting this bill and for a smooth transition through committee, and as well, the stakeholders that are here who have given their support to this very important bill. I want to thank you for your support.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I want to also acknowledge and recognize and thank the members in the gallery who are paying attention to the one-hour lead on third reading of Bill 21, and the remarks by the minister as well as his parliamentary assistant from Brampton West.

Of course our critic, Monte McNaughton, will be doing a lead on this. I think it's worthwhile sticking around for that, which will probably occur the next time because of the time element left this morning.

There are really a couple of sections that are really worthwhile putting some attention to. We support the intent. We also want to recognize what it is. I think, really, that the first thing is that there is actually no money attached to this, so if people can afford to take time off in Ontario today—first, they're lucky to have a job in Ontario today. There are 300,000 families that don't have the job to leave in the first place.

Then, the fact is that they've sort of, for some malicious reason, said, "You must take the entire week. Even if it's taking your spouse to a chemotherapy treatment, you must take the week off." Then, if you look at section 52, if you try to go back to work the next day, it's at the wish of the employer. These provisions need to be looked at. I'm sure, in the drafting, in trying to find consent here, there isn't much attention being paid to it.

So subsection 49.3(1)—defining a “week” is deliberately mentioned in every section; it must be a week. Now I’ve been through personal experiences—most people have—with someone taking terminally ill treatments who may be in remission for periods of time. That section needs to be looked at, for sure.

Then again, there is no support here. There’s not one nickel. For a family that’s already suffering under paying the parking—going to the hospital, it costs 30 or 40 bucks a day for parking. They don’t have a job. I think they could go a little further in this in some respects.

I think also the other part is section 52 in the bill itself. I’ll just flip over—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The time has expired. Further comments or questions?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I think this bill is needed. We all agree that it is a step forward. Many families face illness and they need support. Our home care system—we’re working to improve that. We’ve brought a motion to try to get home care within five days when someone leaves the hospital, so that they can have that care they depend on. But also, family members, of course, want to be there when there’s some kind of serious illness going on, and sometimes they’re required to be there, if that home care isn’t delivered in those five days.

I understand that it went to committee, and there was really good discussion. Stakeholders brought their concerns with respect to the time off and the length of time that the member from Durham spoke about. They were very concerned with the week, that you must take that week off. They wanted to have the flexibility of maybe taking a day or having an afternoon.

We’re in a democratic government right now, as we know, and we’re in a minority government. In that committee, the work was done. It was done by the two parties. The NDP and the Conservatives agreed that those things should be looked at and be flexible, because it’s good for the employee and it’s also good for the employer. Sometimes employers don’t want to have that employee off for a whole week; it could disrupt their business.

The employee, then, can also have the benefit of not having that time off without pay, so maybe an afternoon could be better than a whole week. As the member from Durham said, people can’t afford to have a whole week off without pay. They have to pay their bills, and they’ve got to put the food on the table. Not everybody has that flexibility of having no paycheque for a week. So I really like that—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Your time has expired. The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I’d like to thank the Minister of Labour very much for bringing this bill forward. I think it’s an important bill for Ontario families that are in a time of crisis. People need support. I think we all agree that this is an important piece of legislation. I’d also like to thank the member from Brampton West for his remarks.

Most of all, I would like to thank the members in the gallery today, most of whom came and presented to the committee, which helped to inform the deliberation and the clause-by-clause. They were very thoughtful presentations. They took the time to come; they are obviously very concerned about the people they represent in their various constituencies and in their roles. I’d like to thank them very much and thank them for being here today.

I would like to, I think, correct the record in regard to the remarks from the member from Durham.

Mr. John Yakabuski: No, you can’t. You can only correct your own record.

Mr. John Fraser: Well, I would like to correct the member—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Okay. Carry on.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much. I apologize for my misstep.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Just trying to help you.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much for correcting me. I’m so glad I’ve got your help over there.

I do believe that the week—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: I know. We’re together like this.

In fact, that is not restricted to whole weeks; I think that went through committee. There was some discussion and debate. I know there was some concern about small businesses and their ability to accommodate that, but that passed.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: You abstained.

Mr. John Fraser: That’s correct. I do have some concerns about how that’s going to affect small businesses, but it did pass. I’ve actually had some discussions with some of the members who are here today.

Look, many of us have had an experience in our life where we’ve been in a crisis with a loved one. I know that I’ve had a few. We’re currently having one right now; my dad has a very, very serious illness. We’re lucky: I have three sisters—we have lots of kids that live in the city—and I’m here. But we’ve all got some flexibility because of our—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I’m going to have some time to speak to the third reading of this bill at some point further on, I believe, but I’m just going to go a little bit off the topic for a second.

I had only a brief opportunity yesterday to announce the arrival of our newest grandchild. Adelaide Helena Colucci was born at the Peterborough Regional Health Centre on Saturday, November 16, at 4:41 p.m., at 8 pounds, 13 ounces, and 21 inches long.

Tom and Emily—Emily, of course, is the mother, and our daughter—are doing extremely well. She was discharged from the hospital yesterday, and we had the opportunity, Vicky and I, to see Adelaide on my way to Toronto on Sunday. She is, of course, gorgeous, because not a bit of her takes after me. But we’re looking forward

to spending more time with her. And yesterday, on the 18th, another one of our granddaughters, May, turned six. She's in grade 1 at Eganville public school in Eganville. So family caregiver leave and talking about your family, I think, mesh very well.

As I said, I'm going to have the opportunity—I share many of the concerns that my colleague from Durham spoke about with regard to how, you know, it's a wonderful thought, the Family Caregiver Leave Act. There are some weaknesses in the legislation itself with regard to the time off and the blocks that it needs to be taken in. There are some concerns about that. Of course, the other thing is that it's a bit more of a wish list on the part of the provincial government, without attaching any monetary support whatsoever. That's an issue that I think still needs to be addressed, but it's not going to be addressed in my two seconds that I have—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The parliamentary assistant has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I want to thank the members from Durham, London West, Ottawa South and Renfrew.

Madam Speaker, this bill is the right thing to do. We need to extend compassion to people who are down on their luck, who need to care for their child, their parents or grandparents.

One of the most important elements of this bill really struck close to home for me because last Sunday I attended the funeral of a close friend's father, who was a Canadian citizen who was visiting abroad and had been misdiagnosed and got very ill. My friend was able to go and bring his father back. Luckily for them, they wouldn't have had to take time off from work, because they are in their own small business. But had it been someone who had a job and needed to do the same thing, it would have been very difficult, because the father really needed someone to accompany him back to Canada. It's an unfortunate thing that happened, but at least with this bill it can give family members some sort of comfort and relief to know that their job will be waiting for them after they have looked after their critically ill child or a parent.

I think this is a great bill. It extends compassion to people who are really in a very difficult situation.

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

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: I have two great guests here from Northumberland–Quinte West this morning, in the west gallery. We have Kevin Burh and Kelly Cocek. It's great to see you here.

Mr. Rick Bartolucci: I'm honoured to introduce Dominic Giroux, president of Laurentian University, and Michael Atkins, the chair of the board of governors for Laurentian University. I welcome them to their lobby day, and I know that they're going to have an excellent day.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'm pleased to introduce a couple of friends of mine, in the west gallery this morning: Mark Yacoub and Jeff Turner, who are visiting us from the United Kingdom.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'd like to welcome guests joining us for question period in the public gallery this morning, from both of the two world-class universities in my riding of Kitchener–Waterloo. From Wilfrid Laurier University: Dr. Max Blouw, president, and Mr. Jamie Martin, chair of the board of governors. From the University of Waterloo: Dr. Feridun Hamdullahpur, president, and Mr. Murray Gamble, vice-chair of the board of governors. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like us to welcome the president of Brock University, Dr. Jack Lightstone, and Joe Robertson, the chair of the board of trustees, in the west gallery.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to introduce the best constituency staff in Ontario. I have Marlene Welsh, Trish Fifield, Whitney McWilliam, and with them, my two retired constituent staff Penny Rice and Francine Melmer. Welcome to Toronto.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I want to introduce the best health care researcher ever, Miriam Barna, with her aunt Lisa Marson and her niece Marson Davies. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to introduce two distinguished representatives from Lakehead University, here for lobby day: Mr. Rodney Hanley, provost and vice-president academic at Lakehead University; and also Cameron Clark, chair of the board of governors at Lakehead University and a former Deputy Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Welcome to both of you gentlemen.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to introduce to you, in the gallery, Sheona and Robert Kloostra, the owners of Happy at Home, a home care program in Orillia. They were representing Georgian College last night at the Premier's Awards, for Colleges Ontario.

Hon. John Gerretsen: I would like to introduce, from St. Lawrence College: Glenn Vollebregt, president, as well as Marc Schaefer, board chair; and from Queen's University: Alan Harrison, provost and vice-president academic, and Barb Palk, chair of the board of trustees.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is my pleasure to introduce one of eastern Ontario's newest 53-year-olds, Steve Clark. Happy birthday, Steve.

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a great pleasure to introduce a number of folks with us today in our galleries. From Trent University, we have Steven Franklin, president, and Bryan Davies, vice-chair of the board of governors. From the University of Windsor, we have Alan Wildeman, president, and Jennifer Jones, chair of the board of

governors. From Brock University, we have Jack Lightstone, president, and Joe Robertson, chair of the board of trustees. From the Council of Ontario Universities, we have Jennifer Grass, senior director of communications and public affairs.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Today I would like to introduce Dr. Michael DeGagné, the president of Nipissing University in North Bay; Colin Dennis, chair of the board of governors of Nipissing University; Harley d'Entremont, vice-president academic and research at Nipissing University; and Mr. George Burton, president of Canadore College in North Bay.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'd like to welcome from my alma mater Patrick Deane, president of McMaster University, and David Lazzarato, chair of the board of governors, who are here for university day. I hope the chamber all welcomes them.

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: November is Adoption Awareness Month, and I would like to welcome Pat Convery and Wendy Hayes from the Adoption Council of Ontario for that; as well, I don't see them here yet, but Dr. Wildeman, president of the University of Windsor, and Jennifer Jones, the chair.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to welcome—they're not here yet—the students of the grade 5 class from Elma Township Public School in my riding of Perth–Wellington.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to welcome all the visitors who are here today for university day, especially the president and CEO of the Council of Ontario Universities, Bonnie Patterson, as well as Bob Lopinski, the principal of Counsel Public Affairs.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to the House, from York University, Mamdouh Shoukri, the president, and Julia Foster, the chair of the board of governors.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Joining us shortly is Sheldon Levy, president of Ryerson; Phyllis Yaffe, the chair of the board; and Erin McGinn, who are great city builders in my community. I want to welcome them.

I also want to welcome, Mr. Speaker, my friend Jack Lightstone, president of Brock University, who was a visionary professor, and I am the result of his great labours.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to introduce Dr. Alastair Summerlee, who's the president of the University of Guelph. I think he's still on his way in, but I know he's here because I've already met with him this morning.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I probably could have saved us time this morning by introducing everybody at the same time, but this morning I'd like to welcome President Bonnie Patterson and the entire Council of Ontario Universities, as well as Linda Franklin and representatives here joining us from Colleges Ontario. I wish all the members good meetings throughout the day with our post-secondary colleagues.

Mr. Mike Colle: I have the pleasure of introducing the aunt of the page from Eglinton–Lawrence, Cynthia White. Her wonderful aunt came all the way to Queen's Park to see her niece in action. Welcome, Elena Floros.

Mrs. Donna H. Cansfield: It is my pleasure to welcome to the Legislature Arpana Vora and father, Adesh Vora, and friend Maddy Reid—for page Niam Vora—who are joining us today. I hope you have a wonderful time in the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Did I miss somebody? The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Ça me fait plaisir de vous présenter Carole Beaulieu, de OCAD, qui était ma chef de cabinet pour plusieurs années, et elle me manque beaucoup. Bienvenue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would be remiss if I didn't have my two cents' worth in recognizing Max Blouw, the president of Laurier, who happens to be the president of Laurier Brantford as well. So welcome, Max. We're glad you're here.

We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation of the American state legislators from the Midwestern Legislative Conference. With us today we have Representative Jim Stamas from Michigan, Representative Tom Letson from Ohio, Representative Eric Genrich from Wisconsin, Representative Rob VerHeulen from Michigan and his wife, Norma, and we have Ilene Grossman, the assistant director of CSG-MLC.

Also with us today is Mary Lynn Becker of the Canadian consulate in Detroit. Her partner in crime, Jim Dickmeyer, the US Consul General, is not here with us, but he was with us yesterday. Welcome to our guests from the United States.

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LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As is the custom and tradition, it is now time to welcome—all members will join me in welcoming—this new group of pages, serving in the second session of the 40th Parliament. Could you please assemble, pages?

Morgan Beatty from Prince Edward–Hastings; Julia Brunet from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex; Ana Chu Wong from York West; Amy Falkner from Ottawa Centre; Sarah Giesen from London–Fanshawe; Najat Halane from Ajax–Pickering; Jeffrey Howson from Wellington–Halton Hills; Spencer Johnne from Mississauga–Erindale; Michaela Knechtel from Perth–Wellington; Arvind Krishendeholl from Brampton West; Yong Da Li from Don Valley East; Maya Joy Louise Parkins-Lindstrom from Davenport; Zachary Piette from London West; William Randall from Don Valley West; Payton Smith from Northumberland–Quinte West; Marina St. Marseille from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry; Niam Vora from Etobicoke Centre; Matteya Wendling from Welland; Cynthia White from Eglinton–Lawrence; and Jonathan Arta Yapeter from Oak Ridges–Markham.

These are your pages.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Tim Hudak: A question for the Premier: Premier, the current law requires you to produce a detailed financial report about the province's books before an election campaign—finances, expenses, the debt, growth projections. But there is a loophole in that law that, as it's written, in a minority situation—so if there's an election next—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Tim Hudak: —that report would not come before the taxpayers of the province of Ontario.

Premier, you said you want to be open and transparent. I don't think you meant that ironically. Will you be good to your word and actually support closing that loophole?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I love it when the opposition has an epiphany. In 2003, we introduced the financial transparency and accountability act, one of the first pieces of legislation that we introduced. As it happens, the Conservatives voted against that. We absolutely believe that it's important that people have the information as we go into an election. We put that in place to address a \$5.6-billion deficit that had not been revealed before the election. So we believed that it was very necessary that we have that piece of legislation in place.

I have said repeatedly, since that day forward, that we are committed to that kind of openness and transparency. We're very glad that the Leader of the Opposition has seen the light on this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, I guess that's the answer I expected. I was hoping for a clearer "yes" though, Premier. I hope that you're not wiggling here—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We're going to start right off the bat: Stop. I'll go into individual ridings now.

Leader?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I hope you're not trying to wiggle off the hook here with some misdirection. I hope you can give me a straight-up answer on this. Basically, this would be a financial report that the Auditor General would sign off on. So during an election campaign, potentially in the spring, taxpayers would know the true state of the books, signed off by the Auditor General.

When you crafted your legislation, you cleverly left in a loophole that gets you off the hook. I want to commend the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, Laurie Scott, who has caught you on this, and she has brought forward a private member's bill that will be debated on Thursday.

So my very simple question to you, Premier, is, will you and the Liberal caucus support Laurie Scott's bill and close the Liberal loophole?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have said all along that we'll continue to look for new and important ways to provide more transparency and openness. As with all private members' bills, we'll listen to the debate. I haven't seen the legislation; I don't know exactly what it encompasses. I look forward to the debate.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would just ask the Leader of the Opposition to remember that it was our government that introduced the legislation in the first place. We brought in the legislation, because there was a \$5.6-billion deficit that had been hidden from the people of Ontario when we came into office in 2003.

Of course we're going to look for new ways. We're happy to have passed legislation to bring in the Financial Accountability Officer. We're the first provincial government in Ontario to have that oversight measure. Of course we'll be looking for new ways to be transparent. I look forward to the debate on the private member's bill.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, Premier, it's pretty straightforward. If you're looking for new ways to ensure transparency, it's kind of staring you right in the face, two desks behind me: Laurie Scott's bill. She brought it forward. She would close the Liberal loophole, and she would compel the finance minister, then, to put the true state of the books before the province in an election campaign, and the Auditor General would sign off on them. I mean, what's wrong with that? I don't understand why you're resisting closing the Liberal loophole here.

You know, Premier, that when Don Drummond looked at your books, he discovered that you're actually heading towards a \$30-billion deficit, that you're taking the province to tripling our provincial debt. So we don't really believe—we're going to take, with a few grains of salt, what the finance minister says. We actually want to see the Auditor General sign off on the books before a spring election campaign.

Will you close the loophole? Do the right thing. Support—

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

Interjections.

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

Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General discovered that we're the only government that has in fact reduced spending year over year. We have overachieved on our deficit reduction every single year.

I am happy to look at the private member's bill that the member is bringing forward. I'm happy to listen to the debate. As I said, we haven't seen the details. We haven't looked at what the legislation actually—what the implications would be.

But we introduced the legislation in the first place. We said that it was important that, before an election, people in the province know what is in the province's books. We did that because there was a \$5.6-billion deficit that had been hidden when the previous government was in office, before the 2003 election. We said that shouldn't happen again.

Of course we're willing to look at the private member's bill. We look forward to the debate, and I'm glad that the Leader of the Opposition finally sees that this is an important path to be on.

Interjections.

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

Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

New question.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Tim Hudak: Back to the Premier: I'm not sure, while the Premier is dancing around and avoiding answering a simple yes-or-no question—she says that maybe she has not been briefed on the bill. If you're not, we hope we get an answer as soon as possible, because, clearly—I don't know how anybody can argue with this. It closes a Liberal loophole. It would force the finance minister to put the true state of the books before the province, signed off on by the Auditor General. It seems very straightforward. I don't know why they're resisting on this.

Well, maybe I have one idea, I guess. In your economic statement that you put out two weeks ago, as Vic Fedeli pointed out in his Fedeli Focus on Finance, your medium-term outlook numbers are absent. You don't actually show how you get to a balanced budget. This stuff is actually pleasure reading for me, Speaker. I actually enjoy reading these reports. But they were totally blank, the pages that show what you're going to do for spending in the medium term. You ripped those pages out. It's like saying the ending of a story and ripping out all the chapters. Why are you hiding information? What are you keeping from the public?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've said, we are looking forward to the debate on the private member's bill, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, who will vote against a budget before he has read it, I am not going to commit to voting for legislation before I have read it and before I have heard the debate.

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I believe that this place works best when we have the opportunity to hear people's perspectives and to hear what the implications of a particular piece of legislation would be, just as I believe that it's important to read a budget before you decide whether you're going to vote against it or not.

So we're going to read the legislation. We're going to listen to the debate, Mr. Speaker. We're going to look at the implications. But I would just say that we brought in legislation in order to deal with the issues around transparency. We did that when we were first elected because

of a deficit that had been hidden. We are consistently looking for new ways to be transparent, and we look forward to the debate on this private member's bill.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: Well, respectfully, Premier, this legislation was tabled two weeks ago. I would fully expect that you've been briefed on it. Your finance minister surely is aware of this bill. I imagine he's got to be 100% supportive. I don't see how you can argue with it. If you do agree with Laurie Scott's bill, because we are 100% behind that bill to close the Liberal loophole, then I'd ask you also to produce what's missing from the financial economic statement.

It puzzles me what you're trying to hide. My background is in economics. That's what gives me this scintillating personality and charming sense of humour. But I actually do read these things. Imagine my disappointment when that outlook was missing from your financial economic statement. It makes me wonder, number one, is the deficit even worse than you say? Are you going to raise taxes, number two? And does this mean you have no clue whatsoever how to get us out of the hole you've dug us in—

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

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I find it passing strange that the member opposite and all of his friends there are talking about transparency and accountability, transparency and accountability that this government has brought to this House well before they decided to flirt with the idea. In fact, if they read the budget, from pages 143 to 148 we spoke at length about the new measures of accountability, including post-secondary education, child welfare, community-based mental health, consumer agencies, the tax credit system, and of course the introduction of a Financial Accountability Officer who would have powers well beyond those being brought forward by the private member's bill.

They, sir, voted against those very measures, and now they've decided that they want to come forward with amendments to a measure that they never even read, Mr. Speaker.

We will continue to do our part and bring that transparency and accountability to this House.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: The finance minister says that there's a new level of transparency. Well, I look forward to seeing what the OPP have to say after they've investigated their office over the gas plant scandal. Come on. Not one but two OPP investigations: That takes some doing.

I'll ask the finance minister, because I know he's been briefed on this; I know he's on top of his files. It was tabled two weeks ago. And I know someday soon he's

going to be moving beyond talking points and actually proving that he's got this file under control. So I'll ask him, if I don't get an answer from the Premier: Will you agree to Laurie Scott's bill? Will you close the Liberal loophole? Will you put before the people of Ontario the true state of the finances, signed off by the Auditor General, in time for a spring election campaign?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I don't ask for quiet so that it can ramp back up again.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the province of Ontario, this government, is the first government and the first province in Canada to introduce a Financial Accountability Officer to maintain integrity in our numbers. We introduced interim reports illustrating that we cut spending even again last quarter. The Auditor General has audited our books, and it showed that the province of Ontario took determined and disciplined measures to reduce spending as well as control spending for the last four years running.

We recognize the challenges before us. We recognize that the world market has continued to slow, and yet Ontario has consistently exceeded its targets because of the measures and the directions that we have taken. We'll continue to do that. We'll continue to do what's necessary for the benefit of Ontarians and for growing our economy.

And I say to the member opposite, who stood in this House in 2003, before the \$5.6-billion hidden deficit, and said this—

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: —“The provincial budget”—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. You're not going to get to say it.

New question.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Over three years ago, New Democrats proposed targeted tax credits to reward companies when they put people to work in the province of Ontario. Now, thousands of job losses later, the government has committed to studying the idea. How many more jobs will be lost while the government does that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the leader of the third party knows that we are putting in place measures that will invest in people and infrastructure, and will create an environment that will allow businesses to thrive. We have said that there are a series of tax credits in place that have supported business, and we need to look at those. We need to make sure that the business tax credits that are in place are working and that they are having the desired effects—making sure that we look at those. I think the notion that somehow there shouldn't be those

kinds of supports in place does not make sense, so we're looking at them to make sure that the ones that are there are actually having the desired effect of creating jobs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Before the last budget, the government also said that they would take action to close new corporate tax loopholes that would hand Ontario's biggest businesses a tax break—not when they create jobs, mind you, but when they wine and dine clients or buy box seats at the SkyDome. Has the government closed that loophole?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Finance has spoken to this a number of times and is working with the federal government on some of the specifics, but I think the bottom line is that we need to make sure that we have the right supports in place for business, including the supports that would help small business with their payroll tax, which is why we want to get the small businesses act passed. We want to make sure that the right supports are there so that businesses can expand and, at the same time, make sure that we put the supports for young people in place.

It's very heartening that the post-secondary institutions today are going to be talking to members about what they are doing to work with young people and make sure that the supports and the programs that are in place in the colleges and universities are preparing young people for the jobs that are available, because we know that we've got jobs and we know that we've got young people who are looking for those jobs. We need to make sure that those are linked together.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What the Premier may not realize is that for people losing jobs, this is pretty concerning stuff. The Liberal government plows forward with an HST giveaway that rewards companies for hitting the town, but for some reason the Premier seems to think she needs to hold more conversation and more consultation before she moves forward with proven tools that have helped provinces like Manitoba become the shining star of Canada's recovery.

Can the Premier explain why proven tax measures go to the back of the line while tax measures that help well-connected insiders and cost Ontarians billions and billions of dollars are the Premier's top priority?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Maybe in that exchange, the leader of the third party would explain why she's not going to work with us to get the small businesses act passed, because that will actually help small businesses with their payroll taxes and it would actually help 60,000 small businesses in Ontario. I hope that when the leader of the third party talks about targeted tax measures, she would work with us on that one.

I agree with her that we need to work with the federal government on some of the issues that the Minister of Finance has raised in conversation with the federal government. But there are issues before this House, like the small businesses act, for which we could use the support

of the NDP to make sure that that gets passed and we give those supports to our small businesses in the province.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Liberals should stop playing political games, and things would move forward a lot more cleanly.

My next question is to the Premier. In communities across Ontario, people who rely on gaming to provide good jobs are wondering what the government's plan is doing to their industry. Last year, the government plowed ahead with a plan to bring new private casinos to cities like Toronto and push aside horse racing and the people who rely on it. Now the people of Toronto and people in communities across Ontario, in fact, have said they don't want a casino. Even the Premier has admitted that she doesn't believe that the Liberals got the horse racing initiative right.

What's the government's plan now, Speaker?

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, there are a number of issues in that question, so I'm going to talk about what is happening. We have been very clear that the integration of horse racing into the gaming plan overall is very important. In fact, it's part of that five-year plan going forward. We're investing \$400 million in the horse racing industry. That has introduced stability into the horse racing industry. There is a sustainable future for horse racing in the province, which really was not in place when I took this office. The reality of having the integration of horse racing into the overall gaming strategy has happened. That's part of the plan.

In terms of municipalities' ability to choose whether to have a casino or not, that has always been the case, and that will continue to be the case.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, here's the reality: The government's plan to push new private casinos isn't working, and it's putting communities that rely on gaming, like Niagara Falls and Fort Erie, for example, at economic risk.

The Premier has admitted that the Liberal government didn't get this right. Why is the government upping the ante on a hand that everyone knows is a loser?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think what we've done is we have put in place a strategy that is going to allow the horse racing industry and the gaming industry to work together, to make sure that this industry overall is able to be responsible and sustainable. There are obviously issues around problem gambling that have to be addressed. There are issues around some communities wanting to have casinos and others not.

But that is why it's important that we have an integrated industry, so that horse racing can be part of the overall strategy. It's why there's a new board at OLG. It's why we've got a new strategy in place to make investments over the next five years and to make sure that the horse

racing industry is attached to gaming so that we can make decisions that are rational for communities and for the whole industry.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the net result of the Premier's OLG privatization scheme is that rural families across Ontario have been thrown into chaos, and regions like Niagara, which have already been hit hard by job losses, feel like they're being clobbered by their own government. The government could have addressed problems in the Slots at Racetracks Program, but instead, they chose to put private casinos' interests ahead of tens of thousands of rural families.

The Premier isn't holding any aces, and Ontarians are calling her bluff. Will she reinstate the Slots at Racetracks profit-sharing program until we can reach a sustainable solution?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just get this straight: The leader of the third party wants to reinstate a program that was bad policy, that was not transparent, that was not working for the bulk of the province, and that was not providing a sustainable and open process and open program in horse racing. Repeated reports looked at that. Back to 2008, there was a report that said this is not a program that is transparent; it is not clear how it can work in a way that is fair across the system. That's the program that the leader of the third party wants to put back in place.

Well, we're not going to do that. We're putting in place a program that's going to focus on the customer, that's going to be sustainable and that's going to provide a future for horse racing. It's going to be integrated with gaming across the province. That's the plan we've got.

Interjections.

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

New question.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Premier. Back on October 21 of this year, you wrote an open letter on the ontario.ca website, titled "Let's Open Up Government to New Possibilities." In this letter, you state to the Ontario people, "Our Open Government Initiative will help create the transparent, accessible government that the people of Ontario deserve."

Two weeks ago, I introduced my private member's bill, the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Amendment Act (Pre-Election Reports), which will put into legislation that the government must release a pre-election financial report no later than 30 days after the minister moves the budget motion in the year, or within seven days after a writ is dropped for a non-fixed election.

Premier, I'm doing your work for you. Will you support my bill and let voters know our financial situation before they go to the polls?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I commend the member opposite for looking at the legislation that we brought in when we came into office and patterning her private member's bill on that work that we did. I commend her.

I have said that we are very interested in looking at the private member's bill. We are interested in hearing the debate, and we are looking for ways to be more open and transparent, so we look forward to the debate. As I said earlier, unlike the party opposite, we're going to read the legislation and listen to the debate before we make that decision, but we look forward to that debate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, I did bring in the bill two weeks ago. You claim your government—how accountable it is. This could be a major plus for your government. I'm giving you an opportunity.

But let me list your history in transparency: billion-dollar gas plant scandals; your Ministry of Health is rife with scandals—Ornge and eHealth; there are two OPP investigations going on. That's your record of transparency, so I'm giving you a chance to support a bill that would provide transparency and tell the people of Ontario the state of the province's finances before they go to the polls.

Will you come back on Thursday for private members' bills and support this bill, which will help all of us—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the member opposite's private member's bill and her contribution to this debate, and I can appreciate why you're doing it, because the Premier of the day in 2003 said this: "We are not running a deficit." The finance minister of the day said, "I'm pleased" that we have a "fifth consecutive balanced budget." Tim Hudak—I'm sorry; a member of the cabinet—said that the "provincial budget has been balanced...." He said that on October 1, 2003.

I appreciate why you don't trust the members on your side of the House. We will do our part. We have introduced a Financial Accountability Officer. We have our statements audited. We are presenting our books in advance and will continue to do so.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please. Order. It's very difficult to ask for order when the answer is being given and I'm hearing more noise from the side that's giving the answer. For those that are heckling on the other side, it balances off so that no one can hear, so I'd appreciate a little refraining.

New question.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Yester-

day, we learned that the tragic deaths of four Ornge employees last May in Moosonee was as a result of the organization's failure when it comes to safety and training. This revelation is deeply distressing, especially given the fact that Ornge has been under the microscope for such a long time, and the government has assured us time and time again that all is good at Ornge now.

Can the minister explain to Ontarians how things could have gone so wrong yet again?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There is no question that the terrible tragedy of the helicopter crash on May 31 was devastating, both personally and for the Ornge organization. They have taken action. They have responded already to many of the recommendations made by HRSDC, and I know that they are continuing to work with HRSDC to ensure that all of the directions are, in fact, implemented.

I think it's fair to say that under the new leadership at Ornge, Dr. Andy McCallum, his board and his senior leadership team have put the highest priority on patient safety and on the safety of their employees. I think that it would be important to note steps that have already been taken, and I look forward to the supplementary, where I will go over some of those reforms.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Too many aspects of what went wrong in Moosonee on May 31 seem like they carried over from the minister's failures to oversee Ornge. Months before the crash, a safety officer in Moosonee warned about the risk of green pilots and night flights, but tragically, this whistle-blower, like many like him before, seems to have been ignored. As a result, four people lost their lives and three beautiful children in my riding are without their dads.

This government can talk a good game about oversight, but if it does not include basic safety standards, it's for none. Will the minister admit that she has yet again failed Ontarians?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: In the words of the member from Nickel Belt, she has indeed said herself, speaking to the people at Ornge, "You give us confidence that strong elements of oversight are now there. You guys are a part of this. Your job is to oversee. You know how to do your job. You're dedicated to it, and it brings results.... Things have changed for the good of the people of Ontario." That was in May, and I believe that the member opposite was correct in her observation.

Some of the steps that have been taken since May 31: additional training for helicopter pilots, including controlled flight into terrain; they've revised their operating procedures for night operations, including operations into black-hole sites; and they're installing solar lighting pads at 91 helipads across the province, including the north, to assist pilots landing at night.

There are others, Speaker. I will go until you—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Am I out of time?

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

New question.

ADOPTION

Mr. Vic Dhillon: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

We're all aware of the challenges faced by crown wards. It can be very difficult growing up in these circumstances. In my community, there are many parents who would like to build families through adoption. Adoption provides a great way for crown wards to find permanent, loving homes. Unfortunately, the adoption process can be very time-consuming and stressful for families.

Minister, can you tell us what our government is doing to make the adoption process easier so more families consider adoption when building a family?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you to the member from Brampton West for his question. As I said earlier, November is Adoption Awareness Month, and welcome to the Adoption Council of Ontario, who is here today.

We of course want Ontario to be the best place in Canada for families. This includes increasing the number of children growing up in permanent homes through adoption and legal custody. Through reforms and regulatory changes, we have improved the adoption process for families in Ontario. We've removed barriers to adoption and made it easier for prospective parents to adopt a child, provide permanent homes for more crown wards and prepare youth for adulthood.

I would encourage all families looking to adopt to visit the MCYS website. The website provides helpful tips and advice on how to navigate our adoption system.

We will continue to help families who would like to adopt and assist more children to join safe, loving and permanent families.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Thank you very much, Minister. I'm glad to see that we have taken action to improve the adoption process in Ontario and that, through legislative changes, we are helping families and youth throughout the province. I'm hopeful that families will take advantage of the helpful advice posted on the ministry's website.

Another thing I hear from my community is that many older crown wards are passed over for adoption. It's important that we help these youth find permanent homes of their own. It's my understanding that a barrier to their adoption is that the process can be quite costly for prospective families.

Minister, what's our government doing to encourage the adoption of older crown wards?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you again for the supplementary. We recognize as well that there are often challenges to placing older children and siblings in permanent homes. One of the factors that was just raised is the cost associated with adoption.

That's why we took action to help these youth by making adoption easier for prospective families. Last year we introduced an adoption subsidy for families who adopt children over the age of 10. The subsidy provides financial support of \$11,400 per year per child. The subsidy offers great assistance to families who would like to adopt, but face financial barriers. Through this subsidy, 110 children have already found permanent homes, and it's expected that by the end of the year, 150 more children will be adopted.

These changes improve the lives of children in care and ensure that more children are placed in safe, loving and permanent homes and, more importantly, families.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier.

Interjection.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Then to the Minister of Health. Minister, I think you agree with me that the people of south Niagara deserve a modern, state-of-the-art hospital. You appointed Kevin Smith to be the supervisor of the Niagara Health System. I don't agree with all of your decisions, but I think Kevin Smith has done a terrific job. As you know, he pointed out that a south Niagara hospital, as opposed to maintaining the four existing sites, would save the taxpayer \$285 million in capital, and then you'd have a \$10-million savings in operating from lower admin expenses that you could put to attracting more nurses and more specialists. I think all of us agree that this is the way to go.

The next step, as you know, Minister, is a planning grant to allow the folks at the Niagara Health System to then decide where the services are going to go and how they're going to build that new hospital. I ask you, Minister, will you green-light this? Will you grant them the authority and give them the planning grant to go the next step for this needed hospital?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to thank the member opposite for acknowledging the extraordinarily fine work that Dr. Kevin Smith has done at the Niagara Health System. As he well knows, it was a difficult challenge when Dr. Smith was appointed supervisor, but I think there is an overwhelmingly strong consensus that he has done a great job and really put that hospital on a much stronger footing.

The member opposite does raise the issue of a capital request for a new hospital in south Niagara. It is something that we are looking at carefully. Of course, it does come with the closure of other hospitals. As Dr. Smith said, we would close five hospitals to build one new one. That is not an easy decision for a community to make. I'd like some clarity from the member opposite whether he would support that plan as described by Dr. Smith.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I think I've been very clear about that, actually. I said you should carry out Dr. Smith's recommendations and do it now. What's not to like about this? It actually saves money. It actually means you have

savings you could put towards attracting new nurses who are run off their feet today. So what's not to like with this proposal? It saves taxpayers' money and it raises the bar when it comes to standards.

I will caution you to ignore the NDP's approach. Initially, they wanted the site to be in Welland. Then there was a by-election, so they said, "Well, we also want it to be in Niagara Falls." They said, "Well, keep them all open." They want to have their cake and eat it too. Nobody takes that NDP way seriously. I think Dr. Smith has made the right recommendation.

So the question is this: The planning grant is the next step. You did authorize that for Windsor in a similar situation where they consolidated in Windsor from two sites down to one. I don't know why you did it for Windsor but you're not doing it for Niagara. I'll ask you, will you say yes to the planning grant to allow the work to happen?

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: We want to see that new hospital at the Lyons Creek Road site in Niagara Falls. Why don't you?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I say, Speaker, I am delighted with the conversion of the Leader of the Opposition to actually believing that investing in capital infrastructure, investing in hospitals, is the right thing to do. You will recall that just a year and a bit ago, when our budget included the plans for building new hospitals, the Leader of the Opposition voted against that. He voted against building new hospitals, many of them in communities represented by members of his own party. So I'm delighted he has changed his mind. I'm delighted that he sees that capital infrastructure, building hospitals, investing in that infrastructure, is the right thing to be doing.

So we're continuing to build new hospitals. We think it's the right thing to do and we're looking very carefully at this particular project.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the minister responsible for the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Since December of last year, the government has known that 70% of Ontario's private companies are not complying with the AODA reporting requirements. To make matters worse, this information was only discovered after the AODA Alliance spent months battling with this government to release its compliance data, information that should always have been publicly available.

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The minister tells us now that he is "upset" about the lack of compliance, but can he explain to Ontarians why his government's lack of enforcement had to show up in the Toronto Star for him to finally promise action?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question, as I spoke to this yesterday. I want to repeat that the compliance levels by businesses that have more than 20 employ-

ees and were required to file by December 31 of last year—that percentage is unacceptably low. Only 30% of the businesses in this province have complied.

Since becoming minister, I've taken this issue extremely seriously. During my tenure as minister and minister responsible for the AODA, we have doubled the number of businesses that now are complying. In September, I asked the ministry and they sent out more than 50,000 letters; 2,500 enforcement letters are going out this week, Mr. Speaker. This is an issue that I take very seriously.

To some extent, unfortunately, I have to admit that in the AODA legislation itself, as was passed unanimously by this Legislature, the mechanism for enforcement is in some respects cumbersome in terms of the process that we have to follow. For that reason, we are following the process as outlined in the law, but I am working on this vigorously. I intend to go as far as we need to to get full compliance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Speaker, this 2005 legislation is an essential tool for ensuring equal access for persons with disabilities in Ontario, but it can only be effective if the standards are enforced, which is up to this government. Even more outrageous, the government earmarked \$24 million to enforce the act, but they never bothered to spend any of it.

Instead of platitudes and empty promises, can the minister provide Ontarians with a concrete timeline—what you're actually going to do—for enforcing the AODA, finally?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, I think it's important. There are two issues I want to reference. First of all, we didn't have an opportunity to enforce a customer service standard until this year. The requirement for businesses to comply was December 31. Since the beginning of this year, we have sent out two letters to all the businesses across this province, more than 50,000 in September alone. I'm following up with 2,500 enforcement letters. We also have a marketing plan that we're launching as well.

I want to say, because this is important, on the positive side as well, many businesses have complied. But we have 100% compliance for this act as well as for this standard in the entire Ontario public service and the agencies this government is responsible for.

We are working on this vigorously, and I'm prepared, if necessary, to issue further enforcement letters, including fines, until businesses comply.

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: My question is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, the Honourable Brad Duguid.

Speaker, as the MPP for Etobicoke North, I have many college-aged students who attend, of course, vari-

ous institutions, many of whom are seeking quality training in French. I've also noticed that many francophone students travel far and wide for the great opportunities available at GTA colleges.

When choosing an area for higher study, francophone students across the province deserve fair and equitable access to quality post-secondary education. Such students should be able to choose to study in their area of interest and rest assured that they will have options. Yet, unfortunately, still to this day, they are often limited in those very choices.

Speaker, can the minister please tell the House what the government is doing to create more opportunities for post-secondary students wishing to study in French?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Merci beaucoup pour votre question. Ensuring that francophone students have better access to French-language programs is a key priority for our government. On October 24, Mr. Speaker, our government announced an action plan to increase access to French-language post-secondary education, particularly services in central and southwestern Ontario. We'll be committing \$16.5 million to help universities and colleges expand their French-language programs, including expansions that are already under way at York University's Glendon College, Collège Boréal and La Cité collégiale. We've also expanded distance grants for students.

But I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the work of our minister of francophone affairs. She's been a passionate champion for our francophone community and post-secondary issues. I've had the honour of being able to announce these initiatives, but it's the minister of francophone affairs who's really championed them within our government. She's the one that deserves the credit, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M. Shafiq Qaadri: Je me réjouis du fait que le gouvernement rend plus accessible l'éducation post-secondaire en français au centre-sud de la province en augmentant l'offre existante. Les étudiants postsecondaires de ma circonscription me disent que vos investissements permettront aux institutions postsecondaires d'élargir les programmes en langue française en communications, pharmacie, soins dentaires, droit, commerce, relations publiques, journalisme et biologie, pour en nommer quelques-uns.

Le ministre pourrait-il nous dire ce que ce plan signifie pour la communauté francophone de l'Ontario?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I think I'd best refer this to the minister of francophone affairs.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci au ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités pour ses beaux commentaires. Merci au député d'Etobicoke North.

Ce plan d'action a une importance bien particulière parce que d'ici 2020, 50 % des francophones vont vivre ici au centre et au sud-ouest de l'Ontario. Alors, nous augmentons les programmes avec un financement additionnel de 14,5 millions de dollars et en encourageant la collaboration entre les institutions.

Nous créons un comité consultatif qui commencera dans les prochains mois, avant l'échéancier du printemps 2014. Nous allons aussi revoir la capacité de Glendon à jouer un rôle beaucoup plus important, et nous discutons avec l'Université York pour parler de la gouvernance au collège.

C'est de la musique à mes oreilles que l'Université York veuille demander la désignation de leur université sous la Loi sur les services en français. Merci.

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Good morning. My question is to the Acting Premier. Last week, in an unprecedented event, the elite anti-rackets squad of the OPP took an after-hours tour of the Premier's office. It was described as a crime scene because some in this government destroyed documents so no one would find out about a \$1.1-billion scandal.

We have asked for a debate and a vote on a non-confidence motion, and we have asked for a judicial inquiry into this \$1.1-billion scandal. The Liberal government has refused on both occasions.

Would the Acting Premier please explain to this House why she thinks the Premier can maintain the confidence of the people of Ontario, now that the OPP have directly been engaged in her office?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think that our Premier has done an extraordinary job in being open and transparent. From the moment she became Premier of this province, she indicated that she would be open, she would be transparent, and that she would continue to cooperate fully in any effort to gather information.

She wrote to the Auditor General. She re-struck the committee. She provided 186,000 pages, including 30,000 from the Premier's office. The committee heard from 70 witnesses during more than 100 hours. All documents were released; the opposition voted against that, strangely enough. The Premier appeared at the committee in April. She's coming back on December 3. She has accepted responsibility as a member of cabinet.

Speaker, I think our Premier has done everything possible to make sure that people get the information they need.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Back to the Acting Premier: Does this sound transparent to you? Your government broke the law. Your government told this House on several occasions that the cancellation was only \$40 million, when instead you knew for as many as two years that it was over \$700 million. You obstructed the Information and Privacy Commissioner and destroyed official government documents.

At what point does that government not go to the people to seek a mandate because they have lost the trust of the people of Ontario? Will you call an election and seek a mandate from the people of this province?

Interjections.

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

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: First of all, the member should be very, very careful, I think, with her language.

But there's a broader issue here, and that is that she can't ignore the fact, as she tries to, day after day, that it was the Progressive Conservative Party that went from door to door in those ridings involved with the gas plant and said the only way to see them cancelled was to vote for the Progressive Conservatives.

It was the leader of her party who stood up at a press conference, which is available on YouTube, and said that if he was elected Premier, the gas plant would be "done, done, done." It was their party that went into the last election promising, through robocalls, through press releases, through tweets and through door-to-door pamphlets, that the only way to get rid of the gas plants was to have them form the government.

1130

It's time they came clean with their analysis, their costing and their—

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

SECURITY AT CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Earlier this month we learned of the death of Adam Kargus at the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre, after he was housed with another inmate with a long history of violence.

In addition to specific issues of overcrowding and lack of direct supervision at EMDC, this tragedy also shows the ineffectiveness of the province-wide offender tracking information system in letting correctional officers know about inmates with previous records of assaults or gang activity.

When is the government going to take real action to ensure officer and inmate safety across all of Ontario's correctional facilities?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci beaucoup for the question. I think it's a very important question.

As you know, the safety of both the inmates and the correctional officers is my number one priority. We focus strongly on communication between our correctional facilities and the justice system. We have a centralized database, the offender tracking information system. Inmates' demeanour and threat levels are on OTIS, this information system. Access by administrator, by facility transfer—we have procedures/standing orders for sharing inmate information. Correctional officers are trained for this. Information is shared with staff, including criminal and behaviour history. Information is also shared with staff verbally, in writing and electronically. Correctional officers are expected to familiarize themselves with inmates' situations and share any updates during—

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Again to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services: I think it would be helpful for the minister to actually talk to correctional officers herself. They know that a provincial database is only as good as the information it contains and how widely it is shared. There has been no auditing of the database to ensure accuracy. There are no processes in place to provide consistent access across institutions and, despite what the ministry claims, there are no mechanisms for staff to raise concerns.

When will the minister accept her responsibility for oversight and put systems in place to make sure that the offender tracking information system is doing what it is supposed to do?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you for the question. As I said, the health and safety of both the correctional officer and the inmate are my number one priority.

This system, the OTIS information system, is constantly reviewed. That review is part of our continuous improvement process. The process includes a weekly report of employee concerns related to the system, so we are taking the complaints and we are addressing the complaints.

OTIS was audited this past year from a technological perspective, and probation and parole officers, as well as approved designated staff who have a business reason to access the offender's record, can use a centralized database for this purpose.

Mr. Speaker, we take it very seriously. It's continuously reviewed. If the correctional officers have a concern about it, I advise them to bring their concerns to the management.

NORTHERN ONTARIO DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bill Mauro: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, in 2003, all three political parties and all three political leaders committed to closing all coal-fired energy in Ontario, and two of the five plants producing energy that way were in my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan.

For 10 years I've been working on the conversion, the maintenance and the sustainability of both of the coal plants in my riding, including the plant in Atikokan, and that conversion, I'm pleased to say, is well under way.

Over the next decade, there's the potential for a number of mining projects to come on stream in northwestern Ontario, and while there continues to be disagreement over the energy needs of northwestern Ontario in the next five to 10 years, we need to ensure that Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario are positioned for the economic growth and job creation these projects may bring.

Last Friday I was pleased to announce, along with my colleague from Thunder Bay-Superior North, that the Thunder Bay generating station will be converted to burn advanced biomass fuel.

Minister, for the benefit of the House, could you please share some of the work that went into ensuring the future of the Thunder Bay generating station?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member from Thunder Bay—Atikokan for his question. The member and his colleague the Minister of Northern Development and Mines have been advocating on this issue for many years—unlike the third party, who only seem to have discovered it yesterday—and I want to commend them for their work on this file.

Friday's announcement was the result of the member's strong leadership over the past 10 years, as well as that of his colleague from Thunder Bay, and months of working with the local stakeholders and residents and Ontario's energy agencies.

The conversion to advanced biomass is another step in reducing dirty coal burning in Ontario and puts our province on the leading edge of worldwide biomass research. The continued operation of this plant will ensure that Thunder Bay has the power it needs to support future economic expansion.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Mauro: Minister, thank you for the response. Having worked on this issue for 10 years, I know how important Friday's announcement was for the constituents in my riding and for the future of northwestern Ontario. Not only will this cost-effective conversion to advanced biomass ensure that Thunder Bay has the supply of clean and reliable electricity it needs, it will secure significant employment until at least 2020.

With the Thunder Bay and Atikokan generating station conversions now in place, I feel we're well positioned to move forward and prepared for the mining expansion that may come in the northwest. The five-year contract will allow us to monitor the region's energy demands over the near term and make the appropriate decision at that time.

Can the minister please update the House on what other steps our government has taken to ensure that northwestern Ontario has a supply of clean, reliable and affordable electricity?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Iain Angus, the chair of the Northwest Energy Task Force, states, "Five years is really good. A commitment to keep the plant alive is really good."

We expect the converted unit will begin operating in 2015 on a five-year contract, helping ensure that the residents of Thunder Bay continue to have a clean, reliable, cost-effective supply of electricity.

To ensure the region has the energy it needs for new mining projects, we have also committed to building a new transmission line between Wawa and Thunder Bay, which will provide an additional 650 megawatts of capacity for the northwest. The North of Dryden report lays out additional options for new generation and transmission lines over the short and long term, including the connection of remote communities in the region.

Our government has taken action to ensure that northwestern Ontario has the energy they need when they need

it, and we'll continue to work to ensure that the capacity is there for mining developments in the future.

AIR AMBULANCE SERVICE

Mr. Frank Klees: To the Minister of Health: The minister has been boasting about a new management team at Ornge since January 2012. One would have expected that a competent and experienced management team would have at least ensured that the—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Frank Klees:—federal safety regulations would be met by that organization. But we find this week that a Human Resources Canada report cited that Ornge failed to comply in six specific areas, including failing to adequately train pilots on the hazards associated with operating helicopters in northern Ontario, especially when flying for nighttime emergencies.

Speaker, this was under the current management team. I want to know, from the minister, how much more evidence does she need to conclude that Ornge does not have the core competency to manage an aviation business, and will she agree to transfer that to the private sector—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, it's interesting to hear the recommendation from the member opposite. No, we will not be transferring Ornge to a private sector operator. The improvements at Ornge have been significant, tangible and real, and they have been working with HRSDC to ensure that they fully comply with the directions made by HRSDC.

1140

They have already moved on a number of fronts. I will go over them again: additional training for helicopter pilots, including controlled flight into terrain; the revised operating procedures for night operations, including operations into black-hole sites. They're installing solar lighting pads at 91 helipads, including in the north, to assist pilots landing at night. Speaker, they're auditing all training—

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

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, how much longer will this minister put pilots and paramedics and patients at risk? It is very clear. Not only the HRSDC report, but there were two Transport Canada reports issued earlier this year that show non-compliance in a number of areas, specifically with regard to pilot training: training pilots on simulators in a model that is different from a model they are being asked to fly, not training pilots in terms of de-icing—fundamental issues that any company with the experience and competency in aviation would know. It shouldn't take a report to point out the shortcomings of the management at Ornge.

This minister, intent on keeping the Mazza scheme in place, continues to put pilots and paramedics and patients

at risk. When will she agree to finally settle on making the important changes there rather than perpetuating a Mazza scheme? That's my question. Will she take the necessary leadership? Will she—

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

Interjections.

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

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, if the member opposite would take off his ideological blinkers and look at what's actually happening, he would see that that change is well under way.

I'm going to continue with some of the changes that have been made since May 31. They're hiring flight operations quality assurance inspectors and a manager of flight training and standards. They're auditing all training records to identify and address any training needs for staff. They're ensuring that all helicopters have advanced avionics in their fleet, Speaker.

These steps that are being taken will continue to improve the quality of care, but the people at Ornge are doing excellent work. Just yesterday, they transferred 32 patients. Four little children got the health care they needed, thanks to the good work of the people at Ornge.

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Ms. Sarah Campbell: To the Minister of Transportation: Last weekend, much later than usual, the northwest finally received its first dump of snow, and the contractors should have been prepared. Despite MTO assurances that the ministry has increased contractors' budgets by 16%—and that will put new equipment on the roads—conditions were as bad as ever in the northwest: highways closed, accidents increased, and the region came to a standstill. Even the public school board's bus cancellation notice conceded very little clearing had occurred.

When will the minister get serious about the safety in northwestern Ontario and ensure that northerners can travel safely on the highways in all seasons?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we have added 50 crews and vehicles in northeastern and northwestern Ontario alone. There are six additional crews on duty now in the Kenora-Rainy River area. There are more vehicles than ever before.

There is also a program where we are requiring all contractors to replace all of their vehicles over 10 years at at least 10% per year. That's well under way.

It does snow; there are icy conditions that come up quickly. The other thing that's been added, and in Kenora this is a particular challenge, is that we do pre-treat the bridges for icing, which is the biggest risk.

Mr. Speaker, we have the safest roads in North America, including the north, and given our weather challenges, that's rather huge.

I will look at the particular issues in your constituency, and if there isn't a response, I'll ensure there is one.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: You know, that all sounds fine and dandy, but the bottom line is that you've reduced these contracts by \$22 million. The NDP has been forced to compile road reports for the past two years just to prove to your ministry that a problem exists.

I'm hearing things—yesterday, my office was flooded. I've heard that there's no proactive work being done on roads; that the salt doesn't go down when they know that there's going to be an issue.

Last year was the worst year that we've had in history. We're having things like 14 transport pileups. Some highways aren't safe to travel for a week after there's very little snow.

We can't continue to shut down the entire region whenever there's a snowfall, and your assurances are not working. Will you act now to ensure that highways in northwestern Ontario are maintained all year long?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The challenge isn't just snow. I was in Sudbury earlier this week with the MPP from Sudbury. It was a perfectly bone-dry day and we had accidents because cars flipped over. No snow, nothing visible, people didn't perceive it, but we had icing on the bridges. And when we have bad snow, it's a problem.

It's a particular problem in the north because we don't have enough alternate routes, which is why this government, unlike others past, with no help from the federal government is twinning those highways. I do not run the contract, but they have more equipment than they ever had before.

I've been up with the MPP from Algoma-Manitoulin. I will come to your constituency. I will meet with the contractor with you and we'll make sure you get satisfaction.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: I seek unanimous consent to move a motion: that the order of the House dated November 4, 2013, referring Bill 105, An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act, to the Standing Committee on General Government, be discharged and that Bill 105 be referred instead to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has asked for unanimous consent. Do we agree? I heard a no.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would just say, in regard to this particular request that's been put forward by the honourable House leader of the official opposition, there has been no discussion amongst the House leaders at this point to deal with this.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: One second, Speaker. One second. None of the parties are opposed to 105; there is a way of moving—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. As is the convention, that is not the place for me as the Speaker. That's not a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But I got it on record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know that you've put in on the record, but that's not my responsibility.

I would offer all members to get the House leaders together to have that discussion.

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

The House recessed from 1148 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: On behalf of my colleague from Perth–Wellington, I'd like to acknowledge that Brent Royce is in the building. He's an OFA director, and today he is touring Queen's Park with his daughter.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CLARENCE KIEFFER

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that it was an absolute honour last week to be around my riding and share in the Remembrance Day tributes that were paid. I want to thank all of the volunteers who did me the honour of being present at the various Remembrance Day parades and cenotaphs to present the provincial wreath on my behalf.

Specifically today, I am honoured to stand and talk about an event that I attended in my riding of Huron–Bruce last weekend. I would like to acknowledge all volunteer contributions, but specifically I would like to express my gratitude to one individual from Walkerton. His name is Mr. Clarence Kieffer.

On November 9, I attended a Remembrance Day banquet and dinner organized by the Canadian Legion branch 102 in Walkerton, where the 13th annual Honour a Hero exhibit was featured. Honour a Hero is an annual display and school program dedicated to honouring veterans of all Canadian conflicts. The 3,000-square-foot display was filled with Canadian military artifacts from 1812 to Afghanistan. This tribute was an incredible way for both young and old to acknowledge and appreciate the sacrifices made by our veterans.

I would like to applaud the incredible efforts of Clarence Kieffer. Mr. Kieffer has worked tirelessly to make this exhibit a success and honour the families of all the veterans. This year, Mr. Kieffer obtained almost 500 new artifacts, and has received a stunning 100 additional artifacts from local families for the coming year, to incorporate into the collection. The entire riding of Huron–Bruce appreciates Mr. Kieffer's efforts and his dedication to our veterans.

KOREAN WAR

Ms. Cindy Forster: I, too, had the pleasure of attending a number of Remembrance Day services in my riding. At these ceremonies, we had the opportunity to

remember every brave Canadian who fought or fell in wars and conflicts around the globe.

However, at the Remembrance Day event in Port Robinson, I was remiss to mention the 60th anniversary of the Korean War in my remarks. There were two Korean veterans from Niagara region, Unit 15, of the veterans' association who gently reminded me of my omission, and rightly so. In apology, I'll use today to raise public awareness of the forgotten war.

In this three-year-long war, 516 Canadians died, making it the third-deadliest conflict in the country's history. Nearly 400 are buried in the Republic of Korea, and are inscribed in the Korean War Book of Remembrance.

We need to ensure that we are teaching our children about each and every war and conflict where Canadians have fought and given their lives. Each July 27, on Korean War Veterans Day, we will remember those who fought in the Korean War and thank them.

With the red poppies stored safely again, let's make sure Remembrance Day is not just on November 11, but every day of the year. For the families of 26,000 Canadians who served in Korea; to the 519 who paid the ultimate sacrifice; to Romeo Daley and all 32 members of the Korea Veterans Association; and to the 100 surviving Korean War vets in Niagara, I say thank you. Your service to your country will not be forgotten.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Mike Colle: On behalf of the wonderful Filipino community in the riding of Eglinton–Lawrence and the Filipino communities all across this great province, it is with great sadness that I rise today to speak about the horrible tragedy bestowed upon the people of the Philippines through Typhoon Haiyan. This historic super-storm wreaked havoc and ravaged the Philippines.

Again, thousands have been left homeless, many have been killed, but the incredible resilience of the people of the Philippines is mirrored in the incredible resilience in the Filipino communities here in Ontario. That's why throughout my riding there are churches, like St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, Our Lady of Assumption Church, Glencairn Baptist Church and St. Eugene's Chapel on Bathurst Street, which are raising money, and also goods and clothing, to send back to the Philippines.

I also want to thank the people of Ontario, through the government of Ontario, for sending \$1 million to the Canadian Red Cross to help in their relief efforts.

Again, our prayers are with them. I encourage everybody to keep on encouraging donations to help these people who are in desperate need of basic housing, clothing and medicine. Please think of them in your prayers.

DIABETES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, the recent policy change from the Ministry of Health regarding blood glucose test

strips has sparked great concern in my riding, and with the council of East Ferris. They're so concerned that Mayor Bill Vrebosch wrote the minister and council has adopted a resolution concerning this policy change. The mayor is worried that the potential costs of complications that could arise if those on fixed incomes cannot test their insulin dependency levels would far outweigh the cost of these 77-cent strips. The mayor also worries that this will force people to seek help through the Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works, and sees this as a hidden download cost to municipalities.

The resolution, dated September 10, 2013, from the East Ferris council "respectfully requests that the province of Ontario rescind the policy decision to reduce funding for the blood glucose test strips under the Ontario Drug Benefit Program."

It's worth noting that the money this government spent on the gas plant scandal would have purchased 1.43 billion test strips for those diabetics in need here in Ontario. Again, it's another example of the government putting their interests ahead of the interests of the rest of Ontario.

HOME CARE

Ms. Soo Wong: This government is making the right investments to keep our seniors healthy, active and in their own homes. We're listening to the recommendations in Dr. Sinha's seniors' report entitled *Living Longer, Living Well*. As a result, we're implementing Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care.

That is why Ontario's 2013 budget included a commitment of \$260 million to allow 46,000 more seniors to receive home care. That is on top of the already 30,000 new home care spaces that our government created last year. In total, our government has created 76,000 more spaces in just two years.

Last week, I had the pleasure of announcing \$28 million in funding for home care and community services in the Central East LHIN. That's the creation of two new geriatric assessment and intervention network teams—better known as GAINs—in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, at St. Paul's L'Amoreaux Centre and Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association. These GAIN teams will work with our local hospital to help respond to clients with challenging behaviours or dementia.

I know that in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt the residents, especially those who are seniors, appreciate our government's announcement, as well as the investment in our people and the commitment to keep our seniors healthy, active, independent and living in their own homes.

WAR OF 1812

Mr. Jim McDonell: It is with great pride that I rise to commemorate the critical battle in the War of 1812 that occurred 200 years ago on November 11, 1813. Roughly

4,000 American soldiers landed just east of modern-day Morrisburg, in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, to embark on a campaign to capture Montreal and cut off a supply route critical to the defence to Upper Canada.

A force of approximately 900 men, made up of British regulars, First Nations allies, the First and Second Glengarry Regiments, the First Stormont Regiment, the First Dundas Regiment and the First Grenville Regiment met them at John Crysler's farm. Outnumbered by more than four to one, this group of mainly farmers and tradesmen defeated the American invaders, forcing them to retreat back to New York state.

On Remembrance Day, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, joined over 1,000 people, including veterans, serving military personnel, schoolchildren and descendants to commemorate what is widely considered the battle that saved Canada from an American invasion 200 years ago, in November 1813.

1510

To quote the Prime Minister, "These soldiers, these Canadians were ordinary men who did an extraordinary thing.... Their gift to us is a separate and distinct country on this continent, true, north strong and free."

He announced that the SD&G Highlanders, or the Glens, had just received notice that Queen Elizabeth had become their colonel-in-chief, a major honour for the Glens. The Glens are the military descendants of the militia units originating in Scotland and re-formed for the defence of British North America during the War of 1812. They went on to many accomplishments in later conflicts.

It was my honour to be part of the ceremony.

EVENTS IN NICKEL BELT

ÉVÉNEMENTS DIVERS À NICKEL BELT

M^{me} France Gélinas: I too want to spend a little bit of time talking about the remembrance week that I spent in my riding.

It started on Saturday in Chelmsford. It was a really sombre ceremony in a really bad, wet snowstorm.

On Sunday, I went to Naughton, where we still have some World War II veterans who were there in the ceremony.

On Monday, I started in Falconbridge; the place was packed. They have very good pipers there, and the navy cadets do the cenotaph guard. Then I'm off to the Onaping Legion, where the schoolchildren do some singing. I finish the day at the Lockerby Legion to pay my respect to these veterans.

On Wednesday, Boris Naneff, the owner of Rainbow Concrete, took me for a tour of his facility. He gave me some pretty good advice for good road infrastructure.

Puis, c'était le dîner au Club 50, un club d'âge d'or, où plusieurs personnes avaient des questions au sujet des soins de longue durée.

On Thursday morning, the Minister of Transportation was in my riding making an announcement on winter

road maintenance—a little victory. This is something we had worked on really hard. Then I joined MPP Teresa Armstrong to talk about seniors at Parkside Centre. Note to self: still need the five-day wait time guarantee for home care. I spent the evening in Sudbury at the 40 Under Forty event. Congratulations to Richard Eberhardt, the president of the Sudbury NDP, for his well-deserved award.

Friday morning, mon premier rendez-vous avec Pierre Riopel, le président du Collège Boréal, and a visit to Moose Mountain with Cliffs, and then the Santa Claus parade on Saturday.

A full week, but I loved every minute of it.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Mr. Bill Mauro: I had a great announcement in Thunder Bay last week. Speaker, as you'll recall, in 2003, all three political parties and all three political leaders committed to closing all of the coal-fired generation in the province of Ontario. Two of the five energy generating facilities from coal in Ontario happened to be in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and what nobody was talking about over the course of eight or nine years was: Should we consider converting those existing coal-fired facilities to something else? Two of the five were in my riding, and nobody was talking about conversion.

I can tell you, Speaker, that after 10 years of working on this particular file, I am thrilled with the announcement that we had in Thunder Bay last week. First of all, on the Atikokan one, the conversion started about a year ago: a \$200-million construction project that saved jobs and saved the tax base in that community. And just last week on Friday, we made the announcement for the Thunder Bay plant, which will be converted—in a very cost-effective manner, I might add—to advanced biomass. Both of these conversions will maintain the tax base in these communities, and they will maintain jobs.

There continues to be disagreement about what the energy demands in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario will be on a go-forward basis. That's why this announcement on Friday in Thunder Bay made perfect sense for a variety of reasons.

I'm disappointed that over the course of three provincial elections, neither the NDP nor the Conservatives showed any interest in this matter at all, but I'm very thrilled with the announcement we were able to make in Thunder Bay just last week.

COLLINGWOOD GENERAL AND MARINE HOSPITAL

Mr. Jim Wilson: I rise today to recognize the Collingwood General and Marine Hospital for having received the second-highest designation from Accreditation Canada for standards of excellence in the delivery of health care.

Accreditation surveyors spent three days evaluating the hospital by comparing their performance with

national standards. The hospital met 97.4% of nearly 2,000 standards of care. This distinguished recognition is acknowledgement of the hospital's commitment to their patients and the value they place on the safety and well-being of those they serve. It also speaks to the tremendous team of physicians, nurses, staff, volunteers and board members who work tirelessly to make it all possible.

I meet with hospital CEO Linda Davis and board chair Shiela Metras on a regular basis, and the effort that they and all the staff put forth under such extreme circumstances is something to be commended.

For a small-town hospital that is literally bursting at the seams, that sees more emergency visits in a year than most hospitals across the province, that has had an expansion application in to this government for over nine years and that is also under considerable fiscal restraint because of this government's various scandals and poor management, to work within their budget to provide such high-quality care and to do it well is an impressive accomplishment and something that the hospital should be incredibly proud of.

As MPP for Simcoe–Grey, I am tremendously grateful to the people at our local hospital for their ongoing commitment and dedication to our community. They make our area a better place to live, to work and to play, and for that I would like to thank them for a job well done.

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

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Kenora–Rainy River has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure concerning the lack of highway maintenance in northwestern Ontario. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ENERGY CONSUMER PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT

(ELIMINATION OF FIXED RATE
ELECTRICITY CONTRACTS), 2013

LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT
LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION
DES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉNERGIE
(ÉLIMINATION DES CONTRATS
DE FOURNITURE D'ÉLECTRICITÉ
À TARIF FIXE)

Ms. Campbell moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 132, An Act to amend the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010 to eliminate fixed rate electricity contracts between retailers and consumers / Projet de loi 132, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2010 sur la protection des consommateurs d'énergie pour éliminer les contrats de

fourniture d'électricité à tarif fixe entre détaillants et consommateurs.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Currently, under the Energy Consumer Protection Act, 2010, contracts between retailers and consumers for the provision of electricity at a fixed rate are permitted. The bill adds part II.1 to the act. It provides that contracts between retailers and consumers for the provision of electricity at a fixed rate that are entered into after a specified day are deemed to be void. It also provides that existing contracts between retailers and consumers for the provision of electricity at a fixed rate that are renewed, extended or amended after a specified day are deemed to be void on the day the existing contract expires, except if amended to provide for cancellation of the contract without penalty. Part II.1 further provides various protections to consumers who enter into contracts that are deemed to be void under the new part. Such protections include the right to a refund of money paid under a void contract and freedom from liability for obligations under such a contract.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
AMENDMENT ACT, 2013
LOI DE 2013 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LA NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE
RELATIVE À LA POLICE PROVINCIALE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mrs. Meilleur moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 133, An Act to amend the Ontario Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 133, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur la négociation collective relative à la Police provinciale de l'Ontario.

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. Madeleine Meilleur: I will make my statement during ministerial statements.

1520

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE
POLICE PROVINCIALE DE L'ONTARIO

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, it's my pleasure to introduce Jim Christie, who is the president of

the Ontario Provincial Police Association, who is with us today.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss amendments to the Ontario Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Act on behalf of my colleague John Milloy, Minister of Government Services.

I would like to start by informing the House that these amendments were meant to be passed as part of the 2012 budget. The removal of these measures in committee was an error and one that the other parties agree was not intentional. We know that stand-alone legislation on this item is something that the official opposition has said they will support, and the leader of the third party has stated in writing that she also supports these measures.

The amendments, if passed, will remove OPP management rights from legislation, making the act consistent with the Police Services Act and the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act.

Les modifications permettront de transférer la clause des droits de gestion de la loi à la convention collective.

This will make the rights of OPP officers the same as those of officers working for municipal police services. The government is now fulfilling the commitment we made to make these changes, which will impact approximately 9,000 uniformed and civilian employees of the OPP.

Should this legislation pass, the employer would work with the Ontario Provincial Police Association to make any of the necessary changes to the collective agreements to align them with the proposed legislative amendments.

Ces modifications rendront notre système plus équitable et assureront que tous les agents de police bénéficient des mêmes droits en matière d'emploi dans l'ensemble de la province.

In closing, I would like to emphasize again that all parties agreed that these proposed amendments are necessary, and they will provide consistency and create a fairer system for OPP officers across the province.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm proud to rise in the House today on behalf of Ontario's two million students to acknowledge Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week. Speaker, we know that a safe, inclusive and accepting environment makes a school a great place where students can learn, grow and thrive. That's why today, and every day this week, thousands of students across Ontario will be recognizing Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week.

As Ontarians, we must all do our part to make our schools safe, inclusive and accepting places to learn. This week is the perfect opportunity to help promote awareness and understanding of important issues like bullying. This is also an opportunity for everyone to come together as educators, students, school administrators, parents, and community and government leaders to make it clear that every single student has the right to feel safe, included and accepted in our schools.

This month we are also celebrating a milestone of sorts. It was nearly two years ago, on November 30, 2011, that Bill 13, the Accepting Schools Act, was introduced. I'm delighted that this important piece of legislation is helping to make every Ontario school a safe and accepting place to learn, while ensuring that all students have the support they need to grow and reach their full potential.

As we recognize Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, I'm also pleased to officially launch this year's Premier's Awards for Accepting Schools. These awards recognize Ontario's safe and accepting schools teams for the exceptional and innovative work they have done in creating a positive school climate and culture that supports student achievement and well-being. Ontario schools are among the best in the world, in part because of these teams.

Actually, I remember when I was on the first selection panel for the Premier's Awards for Accepting Schools three years ago. It was an uplifting and inspiring experience for our team to read about the incredible work happening at schools across the province. I remember Random Act of Kindness Days, girls' and boys' self-esteem programs, and a day of silence to demonstrate how victims of bullying feel silenced.

We are all responsible for creating a positive school climate and preventing inappropriate behaviour such as bullying, sexual assault, gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia, transphobia or biphobia.

I encourage you to take a moment every day, and especially this week, to make a real difference in making sure that everyone feels respected, valued, and accepted. I also encourage you to participate in the activities planned this week in your local schools and communities.

So let's all work together to make a difference in the lives of Ontario students and families. Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week is the perfect time to take action, create positive change and help make our schools safe and accepting for all.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It's truly a pleasure to rise in the House and announce that the government is introducing new health and safety training requirements for the province's workforce. This training will help protect workers and keep them safe.

Remember the Christmas Eve construction tragedy where four workers lost their lives? We have seen the toll these preventable tragedies have on our communities, on the workers' loved ones and on their colleagues. These new training programs are about trying to make sure this never happens again.

Following that tragedy, the government appointed the Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety. The panel was led by Tony Dean and other health and safety experts representing both workers and employers. Basic health and safety awareness training for all workers and supervisors were recommendations num-

ber 14 and 15 in the report. The panel recommended that, "A standard should be developed to establish a health and safety awareness program.... It should be a requirement that workers receive this information at the entry level, prior to being exposed to workplace hazards"—and all supervisors who are responsible for front-line workers.

I remember standing in this Legislature when Bill 160, which laid the groundwork to implement the expert panel's findings, was passed with the support of all three political parties in this House. That support reflected an enduring truth: that creating safe workers in turn creates safe workplaces, people looking out for one another.

These new training requirements will lay the foundation for building a culture where health and safety are the centre of the workplace and are part of our even greater focus on preventing workplace incidents and injuries before they happen. These changes represent the greatest transformation of Ontario's health and safety rules in over 30 years.

Since the recommendations were accepted, the Ministry of Labour and our government have worked hard to make them a reality. We have appointed the province's first chief prevention officer, George Gritziotis, who is overseeing this transformation and helping make sure injuries do not happen in the first place. We have increased the number of enforcement officers to make sure employers follow the rules.

We will be launching the first-ever province-wide integrated occupational health and safety strategy, developed with input from labour, employers, injured workers, and community groups, to establish clear priorities and rules that will guide our work in the years ahead.

The Health and Safety at Work: Prevention Starts Here poster is mandatory in all workplaces. This poster explains, in everyday language, the health and safety rights and responsibilities of workers, supervisors and employers. This is one of many tools the ministry uses to encourage workers to get involved in health and safety, and explains when and why to contact the Ministry of Labour.

Our approach is working. Injury rates are down 30% since 2003. But we must do more because we all know the toll these workplace injuries and fatalities take on our families, our communities, our co-workers and our employees. That can never be tallied or have a dollar sign put beside it.

The burden to our employers, businesses and the overall economy of Ontario, however, is known. In the manufacturing industry alone last year, there was the equivalent of 328 years of lost time—328 years of lost time every single year in just the manufacturing sector. The productivity loss is staggering. We cannot allow this to continue, and we all have a role to play.

1530

The government is absolutely committed to doing our part and making sure workers are properly trained and protected. The basic awareness training requirements are the next step towards making our workplaces even safer.

Developed in partnership with business, worker groups and municipalities, the training program will ensure workers and supervisors are trained in the basic, foundational principles of Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act in plain, everyday language.

This new on-the-job training can be completed by workers and supervisors taking part in a one-hour tutorial, either individually or in groups. To assist business, especially small business, the government has made the accessible training programs materials available for free, because this is about giving workplaces the tools and knowledge they need to make sure our workers go home safe to their families at the end of their shifts.

These workbooks are available in English, French, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, Hindi, Punjabi, Portuguese, Spanish and Urdu, and can be downloaded from the Ministry of Labour website or ordered through ServiceOntario.

Our e-learning modules are also now available on our website in English and French and will be available in additional languages in spring 2014. The flexibility provided by the e-learning modules will be helpful and will allow training to happen on the worker's and company's schedules. Once the online training is completed, a worker or supervisor will receive a certificate that is valid for the remainder of his or her career.

The new training requirement will come into force July 1, 2014, and will be mandatory for all current workers and supervisors, and especially new hires, because we know that new and young workers are three times more likely to be injured in the first month of their employment than experienced workers. This time will allow for businesses to prepare for compliance with the required training. Companies that already provide training that meets these new requirements will not need to participate.

Based on the recommendation of the expert advisory panel, the new basic awareness training will include information on:

- the duties and rights of workers under the Occupational Health and Safety Act;
- the duties of employers and supervisors under the act;
- the roles of health and safety representatives and joint health and safety committees under the act;
- the roles of the Ministry of Labour, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board and our health and safety system partners under the legislation;
- the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System regarding information and instruction on controlled products; and
- occupational illness.

This is about keeping workers safe and supporting business with enhanced productivity and competitiveness.

Here's what Scott Ingraham, project development engineer at PowerTel Utilities Contractors Ltd., said about this new health and safety awareness program: "Staying competitive as a business means being safe.

This training demonstrates achievement in training which is beneficial for employers."

It is designed to explain health and safety rights and responsibilities to the working people of our province so that they have the knowledge and tools to stay safe at work and contribute to building a stronger economy and stronger communities.

Our goal, Speaker, is to protect the lives and well-being of the province's working people, especially the most vulnerable, and make sure their workplaces are safe, strong and productive. That is a goal that can save lives, and that is a goal we all share.

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

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure for me to rise to respond to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services on her introduction of the Ontario Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Amendment Act, 2013. I also would like to acknowledge Jim Christie, the president of OPPA, for being here today.

I also want to say to the minister that that was probably one of the shortest ministerial statements I'd ever heard since my short time in this place. I appreciate that the minister wasn't partisan, and I won't be partisan as well. I have been in this critic portfolio only a short time, but I have to give her credit: On October 24, we attended the OPPA conference in Blue Mountain, where she announced that the government would be bringing in this legislation. I want to thank her staff and government services staff for briefing me on the bill over the lunch hour. I'm looking forward to the whole briefing on your ministry tomorrow, Minister.

But I do want to say something to Jim. I've met with a lot of stakeholders in the three and a half years that I've been elected as an MPP, and I want to thank you and members of the OPPA for the tremendous reception that you gave me at your annual conference at your president's banquet. I don't know that I've ever had a welcome mat rolled out that way, and I want to thank you and the members there for that evening. You certainly made it clear where your priorities stood on having this bill introduced to the Legislature, and I know that my previous critics, the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and the member for Simcoe North, have been strong and very close to the OPPA and have really enjoyed their exchanges. So we look forward to the debate.

I also want to do a shout-out just quickly because my son, while he's not becoming a member of the OPP, is starting this month with the Edmonton city police. I know his mom, Cindy Bisson, who is a member of the Ontario Provincial Police, is very proud that he is in policing, and so is his stepdad, Paul Bisson, who just retired from the OPPA. I feel good that now I've got some cops in the family. I look forward to continuing our dialogue and debating this bill in the House.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Rob Leone: I rise on behalf of the PC caucus to talk about Bullying Awareness Week. As a former educator, my favourite times were when the students were actually teaching me about some of the material that we have been experiencing.

On November 4, Breanne Wormald emailed myself and the member from Nepean–Carleton a video link to a video her brother Justin and his friend Matt created on bullying. The title of the video was Be Yourself, a message that was very powerful in just saying it, but looking at the visuals that they created in that video, I think the members of the Legislature would do themselves a lot of good to actually view that video. I think it's a very powerful video, one that was created by these two individuals from Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. I think it speaks volumes to the challenges that we face as a society to combat bullying, and the messages are so powerful that I hope every member who sits in the province of Ontario takes them to heart.

On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I want to congratulate Matt and Justin on their work, and I hope that all members of the Legislature take the time to view the video.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It is a pleasure to rise today to speak about health and safety training.

At our family business, we employ 60 fantastic people, and keeping our staff safe and healthy is something our family takes very seriously. I can also tell you that when you have proper health and safety training programs, your workforce is more productive and better equipped, so this is an issue that I'm very familiar with and very supportive of.

There's also an immediate need for this to be balanced with creating jobs and growing Ontario's economy. There are things that are holding Ontario back right now: sky-high energy rates, growing debt and deficit, outdated labour laws and government red tape.

One million men and women across Ontario are out of work. I look forward to speaking with Ontario residents, as our leader does as well, on the Made in Ontario Jobs Tour that is currently ongoing. We were up in Alliston and Sudbury last week, and we will be visiting every corner of the province to talk about our PC jobs plan.

On behalf of Tim Hudak and the Ontario PC caucus, we will continue standing up for Ontario workers and their safety in the workplace and continue to support improvements to health and safety training that will keep Ontario workers safe.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Last year, after a series of tragic events, this Legislature passed the Accepting Schools Act, Bill 13. Legislators in every party were moved by

the disturbing stories that person after person brought before us about bullying in our schools.

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It now appears that the bill was passed, but not followed up. Every school board is required by the Education Act to have a detailed bullying prevention and intervention plan posted on their websites. My read of websites where plans are supposed to be posted indicates they are few and far between. The minister should tell us how many school boards have written and are implementing a safe schools plan.

Every school board is required by the Education Act to have a mandatory annual professional development day devoted to educating staff on bullying prevention and intervention. How is the minister ensuring that boards comply with this Education Act regulation?

Schools are supposed to be doing schools surveys to see if bullying prevention is working. Can the minister tell us if these surveys are indeed being done and what they are showing?

On the basis of anecdotal information and a survey of school boards and schools on the Internet, it does not appear that this act is, in fact, being enforced, that it is being monitored, that students are getting the protection that we in this Legislature decided they needed to have. If indeed this is the case, one has to ask how many more tragedies will have to happen before the Liberals take this matter seriously.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am pleased to rise today on behalf of our leader, Andrea Horwath, and the Ontario NDP caucus to offer some initial comments about the Ontario Provincial Police Collective Bargaining Amendment Act. New Democrats have repeatedly called for the modernization of this act, and for that reason we're pleased to see these amendments coming forward.

In particular, we recognize that there is a fairness issue at stake. The OPP Collective Bargaining Act needs to be brought into alignment with other similar legislation to give OPP officers the same rights and procedures enjoyed by municipal police associations and public sector unions. My colleagues and I in the NDP caucus will be closely examining the legislation that has been introduced today, but I can say with certainty that we strongly support the removal of management rights provisions from the existing act. Instead, we believe that management rights should be addressed through the collective bargaining process where they can be negotiated and dealt with through the arbitration system.

We appreciate the fact that this government has moved forward to address one of our party's recommendations to modernize the outdated provisions of this act. We look forward to studying the legislation in more detail and to hearing the input of stakeholder groups to ensure that the bill supports fair and positive labour relations for police services in Ontario.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today in response to the Minister of Labour's announcement.

If knowledge indeed equals power, then training certainly equals protection. The minister references the Tony Dean panel that brought forward the recommendations in terms of mandatory entry-level training. I was the training director of the Labourers' union, local 625 facility, and I presented at the Tony Dean panel.

I was supportive of mandatory entry-level training at that point and I remain supportive of it, but unfortunately, there are so many other recommendations within the Dean report that need to be acted on right now, one of which is enhancements of the fall protection training standards. Although fall protection training standards have been on the books—enhanced training standards have been on the books since 2010, they have yet to be acted upon. It's something that I think the minister has the ability to take control of and actually enact those standards.

I'll give him right now eight reasons why he should do that: Conrad Lafrenière, Kevin Raposo, Christopher Birdsell, John J. Smith, Mark Norman, Wayne Fleury, Adam Morin and Nick Lalonde. Those are eight workers who have died since the tragedy in December 2010, because of standards that are really not up to what we would consider widely recognized, and actually of the highest quality and calibre.

It's something that the industry is prepared for. It's a change that we know is coming and it's one that they should fully expect expediently from the minister. I hope that he takes charge of that.

PETITIONS

DARLINGTON NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham.

I see my colleague Jerry Ouellette is here. That's great.

It reads as follows:

“Whereas approximately 20% of Ontario's electricity is produced at the Darlington generating station;

“Whereas it was Premier Wynne who cancelled the new build at Darlington, costing Ontario 20,000 direct and indirect jobs associated with the new build;

“Whereas this severely limits employment opportunities for university graduates from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology” and other institutions “who were to gain experience in Darlington nuclear's training centre;

“Whereas in addition to refurbishing the four existing reactors at Darlington” and potentially the eight at the Bruce station “the building of new capacity is important for the future of Ontario's manufacturing sector and for jobs and investment in our Ontario;

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

“That Ontario's elected MPPs and the provincial government reaffirm their commitment to the complete refurbishment of all four units” at Darlington and the units at Bruce “and that the Ontario government reinstate the original plan for the completion of the two new reactors at the Darlington generating station.”

I'm pleased to sign and support this and present it to Matteya.

ONTARIO RANGER PROGRAM

Mr. John Vanthof: “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 work 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 in major provincial parks such as Quetico, Algonquin and Temagami is completed by Ontario Rangers on multi-day overnight canoe trips...;

“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 wholeheartedly agree, affix my signature and give it to page Morgan.

SOINS DE LONGUE DURÉE

M. Grant Crack: J'ai une pétition ici à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu qu'il y a un manque criant de lits de soins de longue durée, les listes d'attente sont longues dans les institutions existantes;

« Nous, soussignés, adressons à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario la pétition suivante :

« Réclamons la mise en place d'un centre de soins de longue durée à l'intérieur des limites de l'ancienne ville de Rockland. »

I concur with this petition, Mr. Speaker, and I give it to page Michaela.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s, Alzheimer’s, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

“Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

“Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

I affix my name in support.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I’m presenting a petition from Fair Wages Now!

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s minimum wage has been frozen at \$10.25 an hour since 2010, and some workers earn even less due to current exemptions in the Employment Standards Act; and

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“Whereas full-time minimum wage workers are living at nearly 20% below the poverty line as measured by the Ontario government’s low-income measure (LIM); and

“Whereas minimum wage should, as a matter of principle, bring people working 35 hours per week above the poverty line; and

“Whereas an immediate increase in the minimum wage to \$14 per hour would bring workers’ wages 10% above the LIM poverty line; and

“Whereas raising the minimum wage will benefit workers, local businesses and the economy by putting money in workers’ pockets to spend in their local community;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately increase the minimum wage to \$14 per hour for all workers and thereafter increase it annually by no less than the cost of living.”

I agree with the petition and affix my name to it.

LEGAL AID

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. I would like to thank Gurdial and Parminder Deol of Rosebush Road near Streetsville for having signed it. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Mississauga Community Legal Services provides free legal services to legal aid clients within a community of nearly 800,000 population; and

“Whereas legal services in communities like Toronto and Hamilton serve, per capita, fewer people living in poverty, are better staffed and better funded; and

“Whereas Mississauga and Brampton have made progress in having Ontario provide funding for human services on a fair and equitable, population-based model;

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

“That the Ministry of the Attorney General revise the current distribution of allocated funds in the 2012-13 budget, and adopt a population-based model, factoring in population growth rates to ensure Ontario funds are allocated in an efficient, fair and effective manner.”

I completely agree with this petition and will send it down with page Cynthia.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Jeff Yurek: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Health Canada approved Esbriet in October 2012 for individuals with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF);

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has declined to list Esbriet on the Ontario drug benefit formulary or reimburse patients through the Exceptional Access Program;

“Whereas Esbriet is the first of its kind to be approved in Canada for the treatment of IPF and will slow the progression of this fatal disease;

“Whereas the high cost of Esbriet is creating financial hardships for many individuals and their families. Only those patients who have access to a private drug plan can afford the cost of this medication, forcing some patients to go without treatment;

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

“To review and reconsider the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s decision to decline any assistance with Esbriet and consider some form of assistance with the cost of this medication in order to improve the lives of Ontarians with IPF and decrease the cost on the health care system associated with the disease.”

I agree with this petition, and I sign my name to it.

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Mr. Paul Miller: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas servers and bartenders in Ontario earn \$8.90 an hour, far less than the minimum wage; and

“Whereas tips are given to servers and bartenders for good service and to supplement the lower wages they receive; and

“Whereas Ontario law allows for owners and managers to pocket a portion of servers’ and bartenders’ earned tips or total sales; and

“Whereas thousands of servers across the province have asked for this practice to stop;

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

“Support the swift passage of Bill 107, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act with respect to tips and other gratuities and thereby end the practice of ‘tip-outs’ to management and owners.”

I agree with this and will sign my name.

DISTRACTED DRIVING

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas ‘texting while driving’ is one of the single biggest traffic safety concerns of Ontarians;

“Whereas text messaging is the cause for drivers to be 23 times more likely to be in a motor vehicle accident;

“Whereas talking on a cellphone is found to be four to five times more likely for a driver to be involved in an accident;

“Whereas Ontario is only one of few provinces in Canada where there are no demerit points assessed under the current cellphone/distracted driving legislation currently in place;

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

“To adopt Bill 116 by MPP Balkissoon into law, which calls for each individual guilty of an offence and on conviction to be ‘liable to a fine of not less than \$300 and not more than \$700,’ in addition to a record of three demerit points for each offence.”

I support this petition. I sign it and send it with page Amy.

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...”

I agree with this petition and will be passing it off to page—

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

MINIMUM WAGE

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

“Whereas Ontario’s minimum wage has been frozen at \$10.25 an hour since 2010, and some workers earn even less due to current exemptions in the Employment Standards Act; and

“Whereas full-time minimum wage workers are living at nearly 20% below the poverty line as measured by the Ontario government’s low-income measure (LIM); and

“Whereas minimum wage should, as a matter of principle, bring people working 35 hours per week above the poverty line; and

“Whereas an immediate increase in the minimum wage to \$14 per hour would bring workers’ wages 10% above” the low-income measure; and

“Whereas raising the minimum wage will benefit workers, local businesses and the economy by putting money in workers’ pockets to spend in their local community;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately increase the minimum wage to \$14 per hour for all workers and thereafter increase it annually by no less than the cost of living.”

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

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Laurie Scott: It’s a petition in opposition to Settler’s Landing wind park and Snowy Ridge wind park.

“Whereas Sprott Power, AKA Zero Emission People, Energy Farming Ontario Inc., and Wind Works, are proposing to construct 10 wind turbines, known as Settler’s Landing and/or Snowy Ridge Wind Parks LP within the city of Kawartha Lakes in order to produce up to 20 megawatts of power (the proposed wind parks); and

“Whereas the proposed wind parks are to be located, in whole or in part, on the Oak Ridges moraine; and

“Whereas the location of the proposed wind parks is not in keeping with the Ontario government’s vision for the Oak Ridges moraine, which is the protection of the ‘ecological features and functions that support the health

and well-being of the region's residents and ecosystems'; and

"Whereas the proposed wind parks will adversely affect wildlife populations, wildlife migration patterns, human health and the natural environment; and

"Whereas the proposed wind parks will also reduce property values and the quality of life in the surrounding communities;

"Now therefore we, the undersigned," oppose the development of the proposed wind parks.

Signed by hundreds of people from my riding, and I will attach my signature and give it to page Arvind.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Rick Nicholls: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe; and

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario; and

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario health insurance plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians."

Speaker, I approve of this, I sign my name to it and give it to page Amy.

1600

TAXATION

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition which reads as follows:

"Whereas the cost of living in northwestern Ontario is significantly higher than other regions of the province due to the high cost of necessities such as hydro, home heating fuel, gasoline and auto insurance; and

"Whereas an increase in the price of any of these essential goods will make it even more difficult for

people living in northwestern Ontario to pay their bills and put food on the table;

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

"To reject any proposed increase to the harmonized sales tax, gas tax or any other fees or taxes in the northwest; and instead investigate other means such as increasing corporate tax compliance or eliminating corporate tax loopholes in order to fund transit in the greater Toronto and Hamilton area."

I support this petition, will affix my signature to it and give it to page Maya to deliver to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SCHOOL BOARDS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 SUR LA NÉGOCIATION COLLECTIVE DANS LES CONSEILS SCOLAIRES

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 18, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 122, An Act respecting collective bargaining in Ontario's school system / Projet de loi 122, Loi concernant la négociation collective dans le système scolaire de l'Ontario.

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

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Oh, it's just questions and comments—sorry. Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Who was speaking last?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. So now I'm asking for questions and comments in response to his remarks.

Questions and comments? Questions and comments?

Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, when the last Premier took the offensive against teachers and boards of education, we were all in shock in this Legislature, not only because he had billed himself as the education Premier, but because the attacks were so completely unfounded. They were tantamount to a hissy fit by a Premier who found himself with a minority government. They were completely destructive in their nature and implementation.

The forced so-called collective agreements were nothing but impositions; they were not the result of fair collective bargaining. They tore at the root of our hard-fought battles for fair representation and fair collective bargaining.

That isn't all, Speaker. We still operate under a minority government, which should mean that the opposition parties can actually get legislation enacted, that we can

have much stronger input into how our province operates, that we can inform the decisions being made by the government.

Unfortunately, the government scandals don't seem to stop. Ontario's confidence in how well their tax dollars are being spent is increasingly shaken. We have spent many hours in the Legislature trying to get all the of the financial facts and figures about the cancelled gas plants. We have had hearings where the former Premier, the current Premier and many top-ranked officials have given their version of the events, but still the dollars rack up and the full story has not yet been told.

It doesn't stop there, Speaker. The current government continues with the farce about the Slots at Racetracks Program. The horse racing industry is faltering, and municipalities are not jumping onto the casino bandwagon. But rather than work with the industry on how to make the Slots at Racetracks Program even more viable, tracks are closing, horses are being sold out of Ontario and decent, hard-working people are losing their jobs.

My NDP colleagues and I will continue to work with the industry to find the best solution for the Slots at Racetracks Program and get back to the business of horse racing and slots revenue sharing. We will continue to work against the repressive spirits of bills like 122.

This bill alleges to formalize bargaining practice by implementing a proactive process of central and local collective bargaining and providing for central grievance arbitration. A system like this could work and has had some success in places like Greater Vancouver Regional District, which held the GVRD joint negotiations on region-wide issues, with individual bargaining for unit-specific issues. But even that process has had bumps along the road, Speaker.

The process proposed in Bill 122 similarly establishes central bargaining for issues like financial matters and key matters of provincial educational policies. But who establishes what is a key matter of provincial education policy and what can be brought to the table? At this central table, the crown is a formal participant but does not appear to be a party in the sense of being subject to the bargaining-in-good-faith rules under the Labour Relations Act. Therefore, the central table is similar to a tripartite structure but with the inequity of the crown having a slightly different status than the other two parties—so a rather unbalanced process right from the outset. The crown has designated additional matters to the central table, and if these additional items are central or local in cases where the parties do not agree, the Ontario Labour Relations Board will be the body to adjudicate.

There is a two-track arbitration process in which the crown can participate in the arbitration hearing, but it does not have the same status as the other parties at the central table. Shockingly, the employer, the board, is not permitted to settle a local case without the consent of the crown—a further neutering of the roles and responsibilities of the boards and their collective bargaining units. This system seems to enshrine a central award decision

on language for parties with the same central collective agreement. It appears to prevail over any local settlements and/or local arbitration decisions. It also establishes that a union can only be designated as a bargaining agent if it represents at least 15 bargaining units.

To be certain that the position of these unions—ETFO, OSSTF, CUPE, OECTA and AEFO—is very clear, I'll read you the OSSTF bargaining bulletin issued on the 7th of November after a meeting by these affiliates with the Minister of Education. These were presented as a common issue to all affiliates that need to be addressed by the government before the bill became law.

“(1) Crown as party to negotiations: OSTTF ... believes the crown should be a full participant in the negotiations. This would mean that, amongst other things, the legislation should clearly specify that:

—“The crown would be bound by the duty to bargain in good faith (which is arguably now the case).

—“The crown is also bound by the other unfair labour practice provisions under the act (namely sections 70, 72, 73, 76 of the OLRA) in order to provide for a potential remedy in response to government interference.

“(2) Central table for support staff: The article should ‘require’ a central table for support staff and the threshold should be lowered to representation of 11 bargaining units.

“(3) Interest arbitration: OSSTF ... believes the five criteria in the act surrounding interest arbitration should be removed to allow unfettered arbitrations. If they are not deleted, the act should be amended to add a factor favourable to unions such as: ‘The need to establish compensation and other terms and conditions of employment that are fair and reasonable in relation to the qualifications required, the work performed, the responsibility assumed and the nature of the service rendered.’

“(4) Central grievance process: Once a collective agreement is finalized, the central grievance process should include more than a ‘declaration.’ It also needs to give rise to the ability to issue a ‘direction’ so that local boards have to implement whatever decision is made by the arbitrator. This will avoid unnecessary duplication and re-arbitration of issues to obtain appropriate remedies.

“(5) Term and other powers: We believe the crown should not have the ability to dictate the term of the agreement to be two, three, or four years or to unilaterally decide, based on her (the minister's) opinion, what matters will be discussed at the central table. All issues, including term, should be bargained freely.”

This is what the five affiliates see as necessary to make the bill workable and a fairer piece of legislation.

To perhaps be a bit clearer, respecting the government's status as a non-party, it appears that the government is not governed by the Labour Relations Act rules regarding good-faith bargaining because it is not a formal party according to the act. Teacher groups believe it should be a formal party; in other words, there should be clearer provisions ensuring the government's obligation to bargain in good faith and adhere to fair labour prac-

tices. The arbitration criteria is very explicit on the ability of the employer to pay, but there is no mention of fair remuneration, decent working hours and conditions etc. as criteria.

The scope of the ministerial ability to reserve items for the central table is extremely large. This should be restricted. The government has the ability to define two-, three-, or four-year terms for collective agreements. They should be bargained, not dictated, by the government. And the timeline for serving notice to bargain—270 days—is much too long.

1610

The process and implications for central grievance arbitration need to be clearer and ensure a fair process for all employees of all boards.

I agree that the threshold to represent support workers at a central table at 15 bargaining units is much too high; however, I feel that the number should be closer to 10.

The ratification process should be in clear, easily understood language, and, of course, so should all agreements.

Additionally, the school boards have concerns about this process. The provision that the minister may, by regulation, require a school board to pay fees to the Ontario Public School Boards' Association—

Mr. Todd Smith: Point of order.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm sorry to interrupt the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek in his wonderful remarks that he's making, but there's not a quorum here, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We'll check on a quorum.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): A quorum is now present.

The member may continue.

Mr. Paul Miller: It used up 30 of my seconds, but that's okay.

The concern I have expressed before about regulations that are not vetted by committee or the Legislature—raises alarm bells for me on this one. The association objects to the inclusion in the legislation of the provision that allows the employer bargaining agency to be substituted if, in the minister's opinion, the employer bargaining agency is unable or unwilling to perform its duties. Should the government insist on its inclusion, the decision must be made only in extraordinary and specific circumstances, based on an objective test of management accountability, not a ministerial opinion.

The hammer-handed provision that an employer bargaining agency—the school board association—“shall

co-operate in good faith with the crown in preparing for and conducting central bargaining”—but there's no reciprocal requirement for the crown to co-operate in good faith.

Overall, there are many flaws that require amendments in order for this bill to be acceptable. Until these many amendments are made, the bill will not fulfill those requirements.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to respond to the remarks on the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, Bill 122.

I want to talk a bit about the difference in the legislation between the teachers' unions and other unions. The teachers' unions, historically, have a different status. The teachers' unions are actually already named in legislation with respect to who they represent. So in naming, in this legislation, OSSTF to represent public secondary, AEFO to represent all the francophone teachers, OECTA to represent the English Catholic teachers and ETFO to represent the public elementary teachers—we are actually just picking up clauses that are already in legislation and carrying on that traditional piece.

The question then becomes: What about the other unions? The other unions, the support staff unions, are now and will continue to be elected by the members under the Labour Relations Act. So who represents whom is determined by a member vote and can be any one of a number of unions. That's why the support staff language is a little bit different in this case.

What it does allow is that where there is a union that has at least 15 locals anywhere in the province representing support staff, they would automatically be entitled to their own central table. Just so people understand, that means CUPE is entitled to its own central table; OSSTF support workers and ETFO support workers are all entitled to their own central table under the legislation, the way it is proposed.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further comments? The member for London–Essex—no, Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you, Speaker. You can pick any of those three places in any order. It doesn't really matter to me, as long as the three come out—but not Essex. I am not close to Essex. You have to go through Chatham first before you hit Essex.

I want to just comment on the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek's comments, from his new position in the back row. I'm sorry you're sitting there. I'd rather have you up closer to the front. I enjoyed your comments when you were closer there.

However, just to add a few comments to this bill: We've talked about it on our side. I'd like to see his thoughts, perhaps, on the sunset clause that we're proposing to be added to this bill so that we can relook at how well this bargaining agreement works after the next round of bargaining with our teachers. I'd really love to hear your thoughts on the sunset clause that we're proposing as a party here.

We also would love to see regulation 274 put back onto the table to have a discussion of how our teachers are being hired, and I think that would really add to the discussion on the floor.

My one comment, since we do have the Minister of Education here, Speaker, is I'm quite disappointed in the ministry. Last year, I raised a question regarding two deaf children in my riding who were technically able for busing to the school in Milton. They said they'd work on it quite quickly, in fact, to ensure these kids got to Milton. Instead, they responded to my office two weeks ago, six weeks after the school year started. However, the parent got upset with waiting, sold her house, quit her job and moved to Milton in order that her kids can have proper education in this province. The Minister of Education was slow at acting on this. She promised she would. She failed my residents of my riding. I just thought I'd bring it up, since she is sitting in the House.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to stand in this House and represent my constituents from Timiskaming–Cochrane and comment on the remarks given by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

I listened intently. I've been listening to this debate for a few days, and he has given one of the most in-depth overviews of the bill itself. He has done a good job of—and he raised a concern, as well, of why this bill has actually been brought forward. It has been brought forward because of a lack of trust between the parties, one of the big parties being the government. That lack of trust also spreads to other parts of the government—he brought forward the horse racing issue—but on the education front, it comes mostly from Bill 115.

He really focused on the importance of collective bargaining, how we fought in this province for a long time to have fair, collective bargaining, and how Bill 115 seemed to—not “seemed to.” It did jeopardize that, and this is an attempt by the government to try to become friends again. He did a much better job explaining the different parts of the bill, but basically this could be called the education group-hug bill.

As a party, I think we support this bill with some—and the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek did a good job of saying some of the things that we think could improve this bill, and hopefully he will expand on them again in his two-minute finish.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Scarborough–Rouge River.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just want to add my comments to the member from Hamilton–Stoney–Creek, who did a very elaborate and technical job of the bill, and I give him credit for actually doing such a good job.

I just want to add a few points, because I think the previous comments indicated that this bill is necessary because of the mess that took place the last time around. But the reality is that this bill is a result of stuff that happened back in 2008. That was when the government

actually took away the taxing rights of school boards and amalgamated some of the school boards in chaos. Since then, school boards have had difficulty negotiating collective agreements, because they were not the funder and they did not know what they would receive to fund their collective agreements.

1620

I think our government has tried, over the last two terms, to correct some of these things, and this bill is a result of the learning exercise we have gone through with previous agreements: that the government is the funder and therefore the government should be at the bargaining table. In fact, the government should be there with its partners, which are the school boards.

I think the minister has clearly defined what she wants to do with this piece of legislation. As a result of this particular bill, we all have hopes that the next round of negotiations will take place with a lot of, if I could call it, “collective agreement” around the table of all three parties that are coming to the table for central bargaining. But it's a piece of legislation that is necessary.

I would say to my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, let the bill go to second reading and down to committee, and at committee we'll discuss all the recommendations that you put forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, the education minister, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane and the member from Scarborough–Rouge River for their comments.

Starting off with the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London: I certainly appreciate his observance of the seating in the place—that was very good of him to notice. Secondly, I must say that, after seeing the performance by his—he wasn't here at the time, but Mr. Harris and his group, who single-handedly attacked the education system in this province and made a mess of it. I have to say, that happened; I witnessed that. My wife is a teacher, and she certainly does not have a lot of nice things to say about that era.

In reference to the education minister, we can certainly address some of these things after second reading and deal with it at committee level. In the present context of a minority government, we certainly have some workable areas now on committees, that we can listen to good ideas from all sides of the House. It's kind of nice under a minority government, because that certainly didn't happen under a majority government.

The member from Scarborough–Rouge River, my colleague: I appreciate his comments about the content of my submission. I hope that it doesn't fall on deaf ears and that it will be taken under consideration at committee level.

But one of the biggest problems in the education system in our province is the funding formula. We have been after that for years. The funding formula has to change. I'll give you an example: We're losing—

probably a third of our high schools are closing in Hamilton. That's terrible. The funding formula is a big reason for that. They have to change that. I don't know why it hasn't been addressed, and it should be very quickly, because it certainly is a major problem.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise today and to speak to Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

Bill 122 would see the crown legislated as a party at the negotiations table rather than simply school boards and teachers' unions. The crown would be able to participate in central bargaining on matters that impact the entire province, but not in local bargaining.

At the end of the day, what this bill addresses is the politics of labour relations and not simply education.

When looking at any piece of legislation, it's important to note the context and political climate that led to the bill's development. We stand here today debating Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, because of the turmoil that engulfed education last year as the Liberals were unable to settle a deal, and when time was running out, they brought in legislation.

At the time, we realized that money is tight in Ontario and felt that a more equitable solution would be to share the burden with a broader public sector wage freeze across the board. We still feel that this is the right way to go, by the way. It avoids pitting groups against each other, forced to compete for limited resources in an ad hoc manner.

Because of the Liberals' complete and utter mismanagement in the last round of negotiations, drastic measures were required. School boards felt completely out of the loop during negotiations. Relations were so bad that, in an effort to make amends, the Liberals parachuted their hand-picked candidate, former NDP party supporter and union boss Ken Coran, into London West for this summer's by-election, and we all know how popular that move turned out to be for the voters. This is what we must keep in mind when we debate this bill.

That said, Bill 122 does seek to implement a formal negotiation process—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Order. Order.

Would you continue, please?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Red, orange: You blend them together, they all kind of look the same anyway. Who knows for sure?

But that said, Bill 122 does seek to implement a formal negotiation process. This is a welcome initiative. It appears the government is learning from its mistakes. One could say that a government should get it right the first time instead of allowing an avoidable crisis to develop. But in regard to this bill, I say, "Better late than never."

While it's certainly important for government to lay a foundation for collective bargaining, especially given the fact that the provincial government foots the bill for these agreements, its ultimate impact on students is minor.

Every single member of this Legislature surely values the importance of education in Ontario. On this side of the House, we want to ensure a bright future for all students in the province. We want to make sure that resources are there for kids today and tomorrow. As our education critic the member from Cambridge pointed out, we are now investing \$21 billion in education, with an additional \$1.4 billion in capital investment. Additionally, as of 2012-13, the number of students in Ontario was just over two million.

This all adds up to one of government's most expensive and important responsibilities: the education of current and future generations of our children. Just because we are pumping more money into the issue doesn't mean education in the province is improving. Quality of education, test scores, and levels of education attainment should be the metrics by which we judge the province's education system, not simply how much money we spend. Since this government took office in 2003, spending in education is up \$8.5 billion, but at the same time, there are a quarter of a million fewer students in the system. I'll wrap up this thought by asking the question: Where exactly is the money going?

While I have had experience with bargaining in the past, I don't by any means possess the expertise of any of the labour relations lawyers, who I assume will have plenty to say about this bill at the committee stage.

Overall, this bill does look good on paper. Nobody knows whether the process outlined in Bill 122 is a good process or whether it will be successful in the real world. Nobody really knows. Our education critic, though, has called for the inclusion of a sunset clause in Bill 122, and I think that that would be a wise addition to this bill. After the next full round of negotiations, we can take a step back and evaluate what has gone on—what worked and didn't work—and fix the bill, moving it forward. It would ensure that we improve the bill over time and learn from any mistakes that might be made along the way. With that, this government, within—sorry, let me repeat that again. With anything that this government does, there's bound to be mistakes, just like I blundered that particular statement. We all make mistakes once in a while.

You know, I'll tell you something: The PCs would like to see this government clear the deck so that we can address meaningful legislation that will turn this province's economy around. While Bill 122 serves a purpose, it doesn't address the jobs crisis in Ontario. It's critical. We have a jobs crisis here. This isn't addressing this particular situation. We're struggling through it.

1630

People in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex expect their government to do more to keep spending in check to protect future generations and provide an environment conducive to keeping and gaining jobs. By ensuring that

this government has a seat at the table, we can hopefully do more to provide maximum value for taxpayers' dollars.

While it indirectly helps students when their teachers, school boards and government have a set of rules for negotiating, it is certainly far down the line of things we can do that benefit our children directly.

This bill will not create any jobs for our young students as they enter the workforce, nor does it address Ontario's rapidly increasing debt. While these students are busy being kids, this government is mortgaging their future on spending initiatives to lure voters ahead of a potential election.

Last year, we watched as our students' extracurricular activities were used as a bargaining chip. At the end of the day, the interests of our students were put—

Interjection: Point of order, Speaker: I don't believe that a quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Can you check to see if a quorum is—

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

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): A quorum is present. We'll return to the member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. While students are busy being kids, this government is mortgaging their future on spending initiatives to lure voters ahead of a potential election.

Last year, we watched as our students' extracurricular activities were used as a bargaining chip. At the end of the day, the interests of our students were put last.

As a party, one of our priorities is ensuring that this shameful act does not occur again. We listened to outraged parents and heartbroken students who were forced to miss out on their extracurricular activities. We understand how important these teams and clubs and educational trips are to students. That's why we need to protect extracurricular activities for our students.

Bill 122 does not address this concern, nor does this bill answer our calls to amend regulation 274 to ensure that the best-quality teacher is hired to do the job, regardless of seniority.

Last year, we proved what our party has been advocating. If you don't get your fiscal house in order today, you're going to have to pay for it tomorrow. We saw exactly what happens when the Liberal government spends beyond its means. As too many of our young folk are learning first-hand, a quality education is little comfort if you don't have a job to go to.

Speaker, we lost 740 jobs in Leamington just this past week, plus an additional 350 seasonal jobs, plus the economic impact to that community.

Again I say, you know what? We need to have quality education, but if you don't have the jobs, what good is

the education? We must guarantee both a high quality of education for our children and a healthy economy with ample job opportunities for our young adults. It's my opinion that anything less is a disservice to our children.

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

Mr. Grant Crack: It appears that all three parties support moving this to committee. We've had eight hours of debate, so I think, enough talk and some more action. Let's get this bill to committee.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to comment on my caucus colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex. As you know, he was newly elected in 2011, and I think he has brought a lot of additional information and, quite frankly, some important points that he raised about the concerns with the legislation. I hope that at the committee level we have a chance to delve deeper and get into some positive recommendations for improving the legislation as it is proposed, and some of the issues raised by my colleague could go a long way to improve the legislation as it is standing before us.

As you know, part of the frustration with the debates that we have in this place is that so much is left to regulation that we don't actually get an opportunity to discuss and figure out what the implications are of legislation as it is proposed.

So I thought that my colleague from Chatham-Kent-Essex raised some excellent points, and I hope they get discussed in further detail at committee.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My comments will be a prelude to my 10-minute discussion, which I will be beginning, I guess, after this round completes.

What I want to talk about is something that my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo brought up in her 20 minutes: that when it comes down to our education system, we need to start off with the basic belief that a stable and secure education system is, first of all, fundamental in providing a good education system, but that stable education environment requires an environment of trust, and it requires that we have support staff, education staff and teachers who are also treated with respect. Only through a process which is respectful and which is principled can we achieve a climate in our schools that will result in an education system that is the strongest and most beneficial for our students.

In order to achieve that, we need to make sure we don't shy away from the reality that Bill 115 was one of the key factors in disrupting the entire education system here in the province of Ontario. It was the Liberal government that initiated it and the Conservatives that supported it. That bill, in and of itself, eroded the climate of respect by mistreating and abrogating the rights of teachers in terms of the collective bargaining process, and that's one of the hallmarks of our labour system here in Ontario.

But really, it's about the respectful treatment of our teachers. If we don't have that, we won't have an education system that provides good care for our students. That's the fundamental starting point. I'll build on that in my 10 minutes.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: I did take the opportunity to listen to the comments from the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. You know, it's really interesting. You talk about respect for teachers. I remember this very well: In 1999, my wife was eight months pregnant with our daughter Shanae. She was feeling terrible, going through a tough time during her pregnancy, and Mike Harris threw her, as a teacher at St. Teresa's school in Peterborough, out on the picket line. She was eight months pregnant; he threw her out on the picket line.

I don't get mad very often in this place, but to hear "respect for teachers"—what my wife and her colleagues went through in 1998 was just awful; just awful. My family and her colleagues in the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association will never forget that experience in 1998-99. I take no lessons from that member when it comes to how to treat teachers.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Chatham–Kent–Essex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Again, I want to thank the members from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and Dufferin–Caledon, and, yes, the Minister of Rural Affairs for your comments. I do appreciate that, and I appreciate and respect the passion and the feelings you have. With all due respect, that's the past. Today is today, and we need to look to the future as to what's going on.

What we need to have in this House is proper legislation. What we want to see, as we have talked about, is a sunset clause. When it goes to committee, it will do that.

But do you know what? Let's get the economy moving first. Let's get it moving forward so all of a sudden, then, the government has the funds from which to provide.

The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek had mentioned in his dialogue that they were closing a number of high schools in Hamilton. Well, there are reasons for that. It could be declining enrolment; it could also be the fact that there just isn't the funding there as well.

Well, you know what? We, on our side, the PCs, don't believe in spending our way out of debt. If you don't have the money, you've got to come up with creative ways to generate revenue, but not through their resource tools, which are all about increasing taxes and putting a heavy burden on the taxpayers themselves. If they focused more on getting business going in this great province, we wouldn't have companies like Heinz leaving. We wouldn't have other companies in my riding, like Worthington Cylinders, leaving and going to the

States because of high energy costs and everything else. So get your house in order, get it together, and maybe we'll get this province growing in the right direction.

1640

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Now, if nothing else, we can certainly applaud the member from Chatham–Kent for his passion. I applaud him for his passion.

Madam Speaker, what I started off saying before is that really, at the heart of it, we're talking about our education system. To begin with, we must start off at the point where we accept this premise that to have a good education system in the province of Ontario, we need to make sure that it's built on a strong foundation. Now, what is that foundation? What foundation can we build our education system on? We recognize that the education system is based on the great work of our teachers and other educational support staff, and other support staff in general for our schools, that there is a partnership between the actual front-line providers of the care and the service for the buildings; the board for each community; the community itself; and the funder of this program, which is the province.

In this relationship between these different parties, we have to recognize that those at the ground level have a better perspective in terms of what the community needs when compared with the central government, when compared with the province. While the province must be responsible for and have oversight over the funding that they provide, there also has to be a strong awareness of the reality that at a community level a school board and the teachers have a better sense of what's going on in the communities. That's a starting point.

One of the fundamental components of creating this climate that will be conducive for our students and conducive for our children is that the entire relationship between all these members, between all these parties, has to be based on respect. If respect is not present in the relationship, then the relationship will crumble.

We don't need any other proof of that relationship crumbling due to a lack of respect than Bill 115. When we're talking about Bill 122, we can't speak about Bill 122 without giving some time to Bill 115, so it's important to look at that. Bill 115, for the record, very clearly was an absolutely fabricated crisis, or a fabricated solution to a fabricated crisis. To make that more clear, there was absolutely no crisis in the schools. There was no looming problem in September. There wasn't any spectre of a school shutdown across the province of Ontario, and anyone who says so is not cognizant of the facts. There simply wasn't.

Then this government decided in the summertime, "Let's bring back the House. Let's reconvene the House because there is this fabricated crisis. Then what we're going to do to solve this crisis—because there's a by-election going on, let's look like we're able to solve it by introducing the legislation."

Happily—and I'm very proud of the constituents and the members of the community of Kitchener–Waterloo—

they saw through this fabricated crisis and they did not support the government. I'm happy that the constituents did that, and I'm proud of them for seeing through this ploy.

But what happened as a result, though the constituents saw through it and though this ploy was put to the side, the problem that arose is that it fundamentally eroded the respect for teachers and their support staff and the other members of the education system. What happened as a result is that we can't have a strong education system if the main players of the system aren't treated with respect. We don't have a starting point. We don't have a system that we can actually look up to. It can't be a system that will perform well. It's not a system that will address the future of our province.

Really, education—and a strong education system—is the key towards creating a more progressive society; a society that's better off, a society that can move with the new circumstances, the new times.

If we talk about the economies that are doing the best in the world, the economies that are the most successful are those that have fully developed their knowledge industry, that have developed their technology and have fully made use of the most fundamental and precious resource: their people. Some of the countries that have done a great job in terms of innovation, that have worked so hard at developing an economy without very many natural resources, but instead recognizing the power of people, have used their intellectual capital, their entrepreneurship, their technological growth. One of the best examples of that is South Korea. If you look at the population and you look at the natural resources and you look at the infrastructure of Korea, when compared to any other country of a similar size and a similar history, they are outperforming by lengths and by strides, and one of the key reasons is that they've realized the importance of developing their technology sector. They've actually developed it so well that they have some of the largest and most effective and most successful corporations and innovators coming out of a country that, for its size and population, is quite small in the scheme of the world. They're punching well above their weight because they've taken advantage of their intellectual capital, their people power. That's something that we can do, and one of the fundamental ways to do that is to make sure you have an education system that rewards and encourages and develops the talents of our youth.

The starting point for creating a strong education system, which will help us move with the times, is having respect. The respect was eroded by Bill 115, and the fundamental way that it was eroded was by undermining a long-held tradition, an important fabric of our charter rights: the ability to organize. One of those rights within the ability to organize is to be able to collectively bargain. By legislating agreements instead of negotiating agreements, the Liberal government fundamentally undermined one of our charter rights and one of our strongly held beliefs.

Bill 122 is a step in the right direction. There are a number of criticisms which I'll get to, but the bill clari-

fies the different roles that are required for the system to work. The three basic roles in terms of the process required to get the system going, to negotiate agreements—the three components are the funders, who are the government; we have an employer, which is the school boards; and then we have the employees, who are the teachers and the support staff. Those are the three players. In terms of their roles, it wasn't clear. The crown, or the government, didn't have a formalized place in this system, and now they do.

One of the problems, though, is that although the government now has a position in this—they're a part of this formalized process—they are a participant, but their definition isn't as a party. What that really means, in a practical sense, is because they're not deemed a party, they're not subject to the rules under the Ontario Labour Relations Act. Basically, they're not subject to the rules that govern the proper conduct of all the participants. If you're going to be a part of the discussion, if you're going to be a part of the process, you should have the same responsibilities as the other parties, as well. That's one criticism that I think should be addressed.

The other concern with this bill in terms of the process—and it was brought up by some members of the official opposition; rightly so—is that there are a number of areas where there's too much ministerial discretion, and I echo that sentiment. When we have too much ministerial discretion or too many regulations, what happens is, decisions are made outside of this House that members of this Legislature don't have input on. We've seen the ugly side of this reality in the Public Works Protection Act, where the government, this Liberal government, made changes through regulation that increased police powers and resulted in one of the worst civil rights violations in the history of Ontario: the G20 debacle and the treatment of citizens, the unwarranted arrest of 1,000 individuals who were kept in custody—

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Speak to the bill.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: —and they were not treated with the rights they were due. This is the result of ministerial discretion.

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The problem with this bill is that it has a great deal of ministerial discretion. As someone had exclaimed, "Speak to the bill," this is part of the bill: the fact that there is too much ministerial discretion. We need to look at making sure that the discretion doesn't undermine what we do here in the House.

A final point was brought up, and I want to echo it: The funding formula is fundamentally flawed, and this bill doesn't address that. Regions like Peel, which are grossly underfunded, need to have their funding in proportion to their population.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Comments and questions? The member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): No? I'm not doing very well this afternoon.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Mississauga East—Cooksville.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Sorry. The member for Mississauga East–Cooksville.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I just want to respond to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton and say that we've been debating this for a very long time. Every time, certain concerns are expressed, but it's pointless to express these concerns. Instead, why don't we deal with these concerns in committee? If you really want to move forward with this legislation, I urge the House to consider moving this to committee now.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate and bring some comments on the presentation by my friend from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. I always enjoy hearing what he has to say about the various issues, and he tends to speak quite often here in the Legislature. It's good to bring some commentary to his remarks here on the bill that we're discussing this afternoon.

One of the comments that he made early on in his presentation was that Bill 115 and what happened last fall here in the Legislature and in our schools across the province was fabricated. That may be correct to a certain point, but he went on to say that there was no looming crisis in education. I would beg to differ that there actually is a looming crisis in education. We can't continue to pay what we're paying for education in this province at the rate that we're seeing the bills rise and the struggling economy that we have here in Ontario at this time.

Just this afternoon, there was more evidence that this government is on the wrong path and that we do need to change direction. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development put out a warning this afternoon saying that the Bank of Canada is probably going to have to more than double the interest rates in the province to 2.25%. We talk about it all the time, the fact that the deficits that this government continues to rack up—the multi-billion-dollar deficits—are someday going to come back and bite us, if we don't address these soon. This type of interest rate hike is going to cost us another \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion on the debt that we're paying for right now. That's going to go a long way in causing a crisis in our education system, in our health care system and in every social program that we provide in this province—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. Point of order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, I stand on a point of order. My point of order is: On September 19, 2013, in order paper question 317, I inquired of the Minister of Finance to explain the method in which he plans to address, using generally accepted accounting principles, the \$1-billion gap from the 2012 budget to the 2013 Ministry of Finance documents related to the government's planned divestment of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission. The Clerk has informed me that this is now overdue.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Minister, I want to remind you that you are required, under standing

order 99(d), to file a response within 24 sessional days. Your response is now overdue, and I would ask that you give the House some indication as to when the response will be forthcoming.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Madam Speaker, I'll be delighted to bring to the attention of the Minister of Finance the intervention this afternoon and determine to have the answer to the question at the earliest possible opportunity.

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

Further comments and questions?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to make a comment on the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton's presentation. It was an excellent presentation. He got into the rights in the charter of Canadians to have the ability to bargain collectively. I don't believe that this present government honoured that position, and I don't believe the former government honoured those positions.

My biggest fear is that collective bargaining is now being used as a political tool in our province to pressure groups of people to go one way or the other or not at all. Also in collective bargaining, we found that a lot of the legislation has forced them back to work before they had a chance to have collective bargaining. They've ordered the transit workers back. They ordered, I believe, the professors at York back.

Interjection: Postal workers.

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, and the postal workers. They've done this all over our country. I really believe the Charter of Rights has been infringed on more than one occasion by these last governments, and it continues.

Collective bargaining is a basic right of Canadians. The ability to do collective bargaining is their right, and it has been infringed upon by not just the federal government but also the provincial governments, and that's wrong. These governments have no right to be stepping on the feet of collective bargaining units in this province, using it as a political tool to gain support from the other sectors of our population.

It's wrong; it's wrong-headed. It's moving in the wrong direction. It's setting a precedent in this province for future shutdowns, work stoppages and confrontations outside this building. It's a very sad state of affairs where we're headed. It should be stopped now. They've got to honour collective bargaining. They've got to honour the right of unions to exist and to do their bidding, and they're not doing that.

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

Hon. Michael Coteau: It's a pleasure to stand up today to speak about Bill 122. I guess the bottom line is that we need to continue to move forward with education and strengthening it in this province. I know under the Conservative government 10 years ago, when I became a school board trustee—a decade ago actually this month—I got involved because of what the Conservative government was doing in education.

I support any type of improvement in the collective bargaining process here in the province of Ontario

because I know back in 2003 we were really in a tough situation here in Ontario. One out of every three students in the province of Ontario was dropping out of school under the former Harris government. In addition to that, even this building—you couldn't get into this building. There were protests right around the building. You couldn't get in to see anyone who was actually working for the government. People were being locked out.

I think if you actually took the total of lost education days for all the students in the province—

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It was 23 million strike days.

Hon. Michael Coteau: It was 23 million strike days, lost days for our students here in the province of Ontario.

I'm pretty impressed with the improvement we've made over the last 10 years. Collective bargaining, of course, and working with all stakeholders has placed us in a better situation. We know now that one in five students is not successful in our schools, but it's a huge improvement from one in three dropping out. So we are making major gains. We've been recognized internationally for the work we've done in education here in the province of Ontario. We need to continue to invest. Making sure that we get the current relationship with all stakeholders right in this province is the best thing we can do to move forward, and I think Bill 122 does exactly that.

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. The member has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank all the members who added their voice to the debate. Thank you for that.

I want to just wrap up with my last two minutes on some of the lasting problems that we can work on, that this bill doesn't really address and that it should address.

One of the fundamental problems in our province when it comes to the education system is the funding formula. That's really at the heart of many, many problems that are facing a great number of communities. Particularly in the Peel region and in my riding, one of the major factors that's impacting our community is the fact that the formula that's being used right now is a formula that's out of date, that doesn't reflect the population. Communities that are booming, in terms of growth, in terms of population, are not getting an amount of funding proportional to their population. It's just fundamentally unfair. It's resulting in a serious shortage in terms of infrastructure and space. It's creating some severe problems.

One of the other issues that is particularly concerning to me, and this bill doesn't address it, is the fact that in communities with new Canadians who need ESL services and ESL programs, while the funding seems to be there—and the need is certainly there, because we know that our population, in terms of new Canadians, is growing and increasing—there aren't the classrooms; there aren't the actual services available. That's an area of question for me. I'm concerned about that, and I know my constituents are concerned about that.

At the heart of it, this bill doesn't address those underlying problems. I'm asking this government to look at that funding formula and make sure it's appropriate, make sure it represents the communities and make sure that it's up to date. I urge you to get to work on that.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

As the second largest ministry in terms of expenditures—it is very important that changes to our education system be examined today. When we consider the precarious condition of the province's finances, we need to examine any changes this government proposes to make, with a fine-tooth comb. I'm glad to be able to be part of that process today, Speaker.

Last year the Ministry of Education spent more than \$22 billion, about \$11,000 per student. Taxpayers have been asked to spend \$8.5 billion more than they were asked to spend in 2003. Meanwhile, we have 250,000 fewer students than 10 years ago.

How will this bill help ensure that we realize value for those taxpayers? How will this bill help us improve the outcomes for Ontario students in an increasingly competitive and global marketplace? How does this bill directly impact some of what ails our education system? We should be talking about fixing what ails our education system, but this bill doesn't do that.

This is a process bill. This bill is about teachers and school boards and governments. What parents and constituents are really concerned about, and what they're contacting my office about, is, "What is my child learning? Why is there duplication in the system? Where is the value for the money? Why is this government imposing its values on my child and my school board?" This is what parents and taxpayers are concerned about when it comes to education policy.

Each piece of legislation needs to be evaluated on how it impacts the quality of education for our students. Sometimes we forget who the education is there to serve. It's to serve the students. That is where we measure our performance. What we should be talking about today is students and their parents and the outcomes. But the government has chosen to talk about process, so now I have to participate in that discussion and do some additional talking about process.

Bill 122 is an education process bill that attempts to undo the impact of the last education process bill, which was Bill 115. Speaker, at the time of Bill 115, the PC caucus proposed a process of our own. It was called an across-the-board wage freeze. If it were followed, we wouldn't be in the predicament we find ourselves in today. Our process was not to pit teachers against nurses against police officers against MPPs and against other public servants. Our process was to recognize the fiscal crisis we are in and take action.

The government had a different process. By singling out teachers, the government chose a process that upset the unions and the school boards, and eventually im-

pacted students and their parents. I mention this, Speaker, because it's important to remind ourselves how we got here to make sure that we can find our way back.

And so we get to the meat of Bill 122: to provide greater clarity to the roles of the different parties in collective bargaining in the education sector. It is appropriate that the government's role in the collective bargaining process will be formalized, as it is in this bill. When the government is spending more than \$20 billion on something, they need to have a say on how that money is spent. Granted, this bill does that.

Of course, no one knows the unintended consequences that will arise out of this bill. No one will completely foresee how Bill 122 will impact all of the stakeholders. It will take at least one round of negotiation to give us some idea of the impacts.

We know that unintended consequences are a common feature of legislation emanating from this government, and we need to account for that. We need to learn from history. Indeed, this very bill itself is a result of the unforeseen consequences of Bill 115. So we must be good economists and good legislators and make provisions for the unseen consequences of Bill 122.

That is why we need to include a provision to review the legislation after one cycle of bargaining is complete. To us, Speaker, that's a very, very important component. This is something that would allow the education partners to give feedback as to what worked and what didn't work, what achieved our aims and what was an unseen and perhaps unwelcome consequence. Most importantly, it would allow a review of the unseen impact on students and on their learning outcomes.

Let's learn from Bill 115. Let's learn from the past so that we don't repeat it. I'm not saying how it has to happen, whether it's a legislative committee or whether it's a ministerial consultation, but I am saying it should happen one way or another.

One area of this bill where I think we could see some unforeseen consequences is where this bill perhaps places on the bargaining table matters that are rightly the purview of the Ministry of Education. If we're going to place regulation 274 and everything else in education policy on the table for negotiation, what are we here for?

I think it's important that we recognize that not everything should be open to negotiation, not everything is up for grabs. We have a responsibility to students and to parents to ensure certain outcomes. We have a responsibility to make sure the hands of school boards are not tied so that they cannot achieve those outcomes. We have to be mindful of all of the stakeholders here, not just those around the bargaining table. If the intent of this bill is to ensure that all aspects of education policy will not be subjected to legislation from this Legislature and can actually be totally removed from this Legislature and only subject to the collective bargaining table, then there are issues that we have with that process.

I also want to speak about the parents. Of all the stakeholders in this process except for the students themselves, parents have the greatest interest in what happens in the

education system. Parents are most affected by the decision we will make on Bill 122. Yet parents have been seemingly shut out of this process and this discussion. They are partners too. I'm concerned that they seem to have very little role in setting the education policy of the province of Ontario. So we need to consult with parents more. We need to include parents more in the process. As we consider Bill 122, we should think about the role of parents and students in the education system and include them among the list of those who we consider partners in our education system.

Speaker, Bill 115, while very flawed, at least demonstrated that the previous Premier and finance minister, though belatedly, seemed to fleetingly recognize that this province is facing a financial crisis.

1710

The government is hoping that by not focusing on the real problem, we can be distracted. The taxpayers and voters will be distracted. I can tell you the bond market will not be distracted. The bond market will not be fooled by process bills. The bond market does not care how much consultation and conversation takes place. They want the government to get serious about its spending problem and so do taxpayers.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we're spending \$8.5 billion more on education than we were 10 years ago, and we have 250,000 less students. Are the students benefiting? Are parents benefiting? As my colleague the member from Cambridge outlined in his opening comment on all this, it isn't clear that those 250,000 fewer students are indeed benefiting. There's evidence that the concerns of parents and taxpayers that I hear in my office are valid. There is evidence that simply throwing money at a problem is not a solution, that we need to look for other solutions, actual solutions. When we set education policy, we need to focus on the outcomes to students and their parents. These are our ultimate partners in education. These are whom we are here to represent.

As I come to the close of my arguments on this legislation, I would say, let's recognize what's worthwhile in Bill 122, but let's not forget that education and policy are to be set here, not at the bargaining table. We need to talk about putting regulation 274 back on the table. As the government is putting forward Bill 122, let's remember that this is a result of unforeseen consequences of Bill 115, and let's not repeat that mistake. Let's make provision in the legislation to come back and review, to come back and consult with all of our partners in education to make sure we get it right.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to stand in this House and speak on behalf of residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane and respond to the member from Nipissing.

Several times in this House today we've heard that we're wasting our time debating here and this should go to committee. Although on many occasions I don't agree with the member from Nipissing, he did further this

debate. I think that's something we have to keep in mind, that this is a very important job we fulfill, and when we bring issues to the table, which he has done—it's something we should all remember. It's an important thing.

One of the things that we should also add to the table is that although this is a process bill, process by itself—if you ignore process, like we did, like the other two parties did with Bill 115, because we voted against it—Bill 115 ignored process and tried to shove something down the people's throats, and that's why it failed. That's why process is important, but it's a very small part of the whole education spectrum, and you can't look at it in a vacuum. You can't ignore process because when you ignore it totally, then you get what we had with Bill 115, which was mayhem.

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

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: With reference to education and the deep support and commitment that our government has had for the past 10 years on harmonizing the education system, on building children's futures and preparing them for the world of tomorrow, I would simply offer this observation: that a teacher affects eternity. He can never tell where his influence ends.

In distinction to other governments that have preceded us, whose job it was to foster crises—I call that the Snobelen effect, as you will remember—I think we have gone the extra mile in order to build our children's futures. My colleagues of course have detailed many, many of the different initiatives, but I think we need to move ahead and let's get this legislation passed.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: It's always a pleasure to bring comments following the remarks of our finance critic and our member from Nipissing, Mr. Fedeli, who has his finger on the pulse of what's happening in the economy, as you very clearly heard moments ago when he was speaking for 10 minutes on this bill and the situation that we find ourselves in in the province of Ontario.

The fact that we continue to throw money at these problems—it's very clear to me that during the caucus meeting of the government today they would just like to forget that last fall ever happened, and they're trying to remind everybody who is watching this afternoon or anybody who might be following this debate that they're the reason for the chaos in our education system that occurred last fall. They were the ones who designed Bill 115, which caused chaos in our schools.

The member who just spoke in regard to the comments from our member from Nipissing would have you forget that they were responsible for that. It was their government that brought in Bill 115. It was the first glimmer of recognition that we here in the official opposition, saw from this government in 10 years that they had any kind of an idea that there was actually a problem with the financial situation in the province.

Often, you'll hear about hitting rock bottom. Well, we are at rock bottom now. We're at rock bottom. As I

alluded to earlier, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has advised the Bank of Canada that they might have to jack up our interest rates by double, which would cost us another \$2 billion a year in interest paid on our debt. They have created the situation that we find ourselves in. As you heard from our critic for finance, Mr. Fedeli, we're the party, and we are going to be the government, that's going to bail us out.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's an interesting comment from the last speaker that they are going to be the government; that remains to be seen. I'm not sure about that.

In reference to the member from Nipissing's comments about parent involvement, I'm not quite sure where he's going with that. I don't know if it's politically expedient for him to mention the parents, but the bottom line is, we do have parent councils. We do have school board trustees. We do have school boards that deal with this daily. People in this Legislature do not deal with educational problems daily. We put down the legislation, but the legislation is always advised through teachers' organizations and through school boards. They come and advise us. I don't think the interference of any government should be allowed at that level. That's why we have collective bargaining, that's why we have school boards, that's why we have trustees and that's why we have parent councils. They know best—not the people sitting in this room.

When the member says that more parents should be involved, a lot of parents are involved as we speak, they are all the time, and they certainly bring their concerns forward to our local representatives, whether it be city council, whether it be the trustee or whether it be the board. That's an ongoing process, and it's a good process. It's a healthy process. It's a democratic process that has been around this province from day one.

I'm really not quite sure where he's trying to get more involvement. We couldn't have any more involvement than we've got now. In fact, sometimes we're overloaded with involvement. There are too many so-called experts in education who aren't experts. Leave it to the people who do it every day. A good general does not tell the guys in the trenches or the captains what to do. He sits at headquarters and passes on an order, but he's not the guy doing the fighting; it's the people in the trenches.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to thank the members from Timiskaming—Cochrane, Etobicoke North, Prince Edward—Hastings and Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for their commentary.

Our caucus has tried to work with this government to clear the deck so that we can talk about the economy. We've tried to clear the deck so that we can work with this government to meet head-on the crisis they created: a spending addiction so out of control that we have three times the per capita deficit of California; a debt problem so huge that we are the seventh largest non-sovereign

consumer of debt on the planet. We are here today talking about an education process bill designed to fix the effects of the last education process bill because this government has absolutely nothing to say on economic issues.

As I stated in my most recent Fedeli Focus on Finance, which you can download at www.fedeli.com—you can now download that. It's the Fedeli Focus on Finance concerning the fall economic statement. It's clearer than ever that the government has no plan to balance the budget. For the first time, the government spoke openly about the possibility of not even meeting its own modest deficit reduction targets. While Bill 115 is very flawed, it at least demonstrated on the fringes, and belatedly and almost fleetingly, that the province has a crisis that we're facing, a financial crisis.

1720

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to rise in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane, in this case in regard to the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2013.

As some of the other speakers have stated, this is a bill about process, about wage negotiations within the education system. But you can't speak about that in a vacuum. If you're going to talk about the education system, you have to talk about the system as a whole to put this bill into context.

I think we can all agree, all of us as legislators—I hope we can all agree—that publicly funded education is one of the pillars on which the success of this province is built. I think we can all agree that it's a system under stress. We will disagree as to why and where, but I think we can all agree it's under stress.

I'd like to point out a couple of areas in my northern rural riding where—and who we're talking about here. It's our kids and their education and where the stresses are. A big issue in my riding—it has to do with the funding formula—is the closure of rural schools. It's a constant threat throughout the north and throughout, I think, all rural parts of the province, and probably some urban parts of the province as well, but my riding is all rural. I've had two lately, Charlton-Savard and Cobalt Public, and they've been the latest victims. This has pitted townspeople against the school board trustees, because they blame the school board. In reality, they're both fighting the same enemy. They're fighting because the provincial funding formula does not recognize the role of the small rural school.

The school is the hub of the community, and when it's closed, the fabric of the town starts to fray and sometimes is irreparably damaged. This has happened many times across the north. But the real victims are the students who spend several hours on the bus every day. Parents take a leap of faith every day when they send their kids to school, all parents do. But imagine when your local school is closed and you have to send a six-year-old on

an hour or longer bus ride on northern roads at 30 below. That's not conducive to a good education. In some cases, these children pass by a shuttered school.

Some people will say or think, “Well, why do people live there, then? Why are small towns, why are small schools important?” Well, because rural infrastructure is what this province is built upon—in my riding, the farms, the mines, the mills, the people who work there. They need skilled, quality people. People research where they move to based on the services they can get, based on the hospitals, based on the doctors, based on the education that their young families can get.

If there's no school or if you have to drive or if they have to spend an hour and a half each way on the school bus, it's going to make a determination on whether that plant, that mine or those farms can get the quality, skilled people they need. That's something that the funding formula doesn't recognize. Maybe it's something that the funding formula can't recognize. But somehow in the structure of things it's going to have to be recognized, because it's one of the things that's holding a lot of non-urban businesses back. It's holding a lot of communities back, because there are people who—in my riding, we have jobs. We don't have a jobs shortage. We actually have a shortage of people for some occupations, for skilled occupations. But one of the things holding them back is—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: But they don't pick those communities, because there's no school. It's something we have to get over and understand that.

Another thing: Even in the schools that aren't in trouble or that are still operating and are fairly solid, because of the way the funding formula is structured, there is a severe lack of funding for special-needs kids, people who need special help with language and other special needs. They are not as available in small rural schools as they should be. Once again, when a family is looking for a place to live and the job is there, they're going to look at things like that. That's something that doesn't directly relate to this but it does relate to education, and it does relate to the future of our province and to the prosperity of all parts of our province, because for our province to return to the prosperity that we remember, we are going to have to look at all parts of the province. There is a lot of potential in the rural areas in northern Ontario, but that's one of the things that's holding us back.

Getting back to the bill itself, Speaker, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, it is a bill about process. In itself, that's not a bad thing, because process is one of the things that legislators should discuss, because if you don't get process right, you get big problems; you get mayhem. That's what we got with Bill 115. We got a government bill. I'm not saying that there weren't problems in the payment process or in the school board process, in the negotiations process, but they made it a lot worse by creating a crisis.

Some will say, “Why would they bother creating a crisis? Why would they bother losing the respect of all

the players, not just the unions, but the school boards? Why would they do that?" The sad thing is, they did that for one seat. Why would they do that for one seat, for one by-election? They did that to try to get a majority. That's sad, actually, because a minority Parliament can work. But when you make all your decisions—or, in that case, a huge decision—based on just jockeying to get a majority, that's when you get big problems.

And that led to—again, who were the victims? Who were the victims of that jockeying? All the people involved in the education system, but the biggest victims were the kids: the kids who didn't get extracurricular activities; the kids, basically, whose education suffered because of the lack of—no one knew where they were going at that time. It was a crisis that just—it's hard to explain what happened. My kids were there too, and it was hard to explain. It was hard to tell your constituents what was actually happening, and why it was happening.

This bill, Bill 122—it's funny, if you think about it. Bill 122 has been introduced to fix the problems caused by Bill 115, the problems caused by a bill put forward by the government and proudly supported by—

Interjection: Our friends.

Mr. John Vanthof: —by our friends in the Conservative Party.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Your uncle too.

1730

Mr. John Vanthof: My uncle too—no problem.

So is Bill 122 an improvement over Bill 115? Yes, because I think this one does attempt to respect the collective bargaining process and this one does officially put everyone at the table. Are there problems with the bill? Yes. Should this bill go to committee? Yes. But should this bill be fully discussed in this House by everyone who wants to talk and everyone who feels they can bring something different to the table? Because, Speaker, I have been listening to this, sitting here in the House and also watching in my office, and everyone has brought something different to the table. That's our job, and that's something we should hold very dear. This bill should be brought forward to committee, but it should be fully discussed here so that we can bring the best changes we can in committee to serve the people we should be serving here, the future of our province: the students of Ontario.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to thank the member for his comments, but I think we do have a bit of revisionist history going on here this afternoon.

This bill addresses the problem that was created when the Conservative government of Mike Harris removed taxation rights from school boards. We have never, ever since then had a proper collective bargaining system in the school board sector.

For the first time since Mike Harris changed the law, we actually now have legislation that provides a role for all the players at the table. The government will be there as the funder of the system, the school boards will be

there as the employer, and the unions, of course, will be representing the workers.

I think we need to get on with it. The member was absolutely correct when he said that we need to get the bill into committee, because that's where we can discuss any fine-tuning. So we just need to get this second reading on the road and get it out of here.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Prince Edward—Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate again. I've had an opportunity to speak a number of times here this afternoon on this bill and I've neglected a very important bit of news, Madam Speaker. My wife is a high school teacher and a member of the OSSTF at Moira Secondary School in east end Belleville. And for the second straight year, the Moira senior Trojans are going to be playing in the National Capital Bowl. The big game is this Saturday afternoon at noon at Centennial Secondary School, which is their archrival. I'm not exactly sure why they're playing there, but they have a nice turf field, so maybe that's it. They are going for their second straight National Capital Bowl on Saturday. So good luck to the Moira Trojans and coach Dwayne Lambert, and Dave Corbett and all that crew.

Anyway, my wife is a great teacher. She was upset by what the government did back in September of last year. And they seem to forget that they are the government; they are the ones that are responsible for bringing Bill 115 to the floor of this Legislature. They want to talk about stuff that happened 15 years ago, but they're completely forgetting the fact, Madam Speaker, that the Liberal Party of Ontario has been governing this province for the last 10 years and they keep digging that hole deeper and deeper. They've spent \$8.5 billion more on education since they took office, for 250,000 fewer students. And that money isn't going into football programs at Moira. That money isn't going into music programs. That money isn't going into improving the curriculum for the students in our schools. That money is almost 100% going into the pockets of members of the Working Families coalition, Madam Speaker. That's the bottom line. That's why we have this bill today and that's why they're trying to distance themselves from what they did last fall.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I must say that every time I'm in this House I certainly get the odd shock. This was certainly another shock. I do believe Bill 115—who voted for that? Oh, the Liberals and the Conservatives. So your wife must have been mad at you too. We voted against it. I just wanted to clarify that for the viewers today.

Secondly, I can't believe they throw rocks at each other. I do remember the Harris days because my wife's a teacher too. Believe me, you are not high on her list of favourite parties.

I can safely say, though, when I listened to the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane talk, he certainly hit on some points that are very important about rural schools. Rural schools are not just schools; they are community

centres. They are used for after-hours things: for dances, for basketball, for floor hockey. It's a very important cog in the wheel of rural life. And when we close them, and force our kids to take three- and four-hour bus rides in the morning to school and then back, they spend more time on the bus than they do in the classroom. By the time they get to school, they're half asleep. So I think a little bit of organizational changes, a little bit of common sense, could prevail in rural schools and rural communities, and they don't.

You want to talk about urban centres. Let's talk about Hamilton, one of the largest cities in Ontario. You're closing one third of our high schools, because we can't afford to keep them open on this funding formula. It's brutal. I don't know why the government would be waving the flag of victory. When you take a look at Hamilton schools, our board gets slaughtered with not enough financing. A lot of it goes to Toronto, but they sometimes forget about the other cities that are large in Ontario that need help too. We have to get a handle on the big picture, folks, because we certainly don't have it.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane for his remarks. I totally agree: Publicly funded education is our most important responsibility as legislators for our children.

There's a lot of fodder this afternoon to continue on. The fact of the matter is, we've had nine hours of debate—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Not enough.

Mr. John Fraser: Apparently, from that side, that's what I'm hearing.

We've had nine hours of debate. We all agree on this.

So the second point I agree with the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane on is that minority governments can work. Let's just get this bill to committee so minority governments can work.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: First of all, I'd like to thank the Minister of Education, the member from Prince Edward-Hastings, the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek and the member from Ottawa Centre—

Mr. Paul Miller: Ottawa South.

Mr. John Vanthof: Ottawa South—my apologies.

First, to the Minister of Education: I agree. A lot of this problem started when the Harris government took away the ability of the school boards to tax and took a lot of the money out—that's where a lot of the problems started. But the temperature of the problem was increased a lot with Bill 115.

To the member from Prince Edward-Hastings: Go, Trojans! But, in a minority Parliament, it takes two parties to pass a bill. For Bill 115, if we voted against and you voted against, Bill 115 wouldn't have happened. So it takes two in a minority Parliament—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: But on Bill 115, you were the proppers of mayhem.

For the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, I'd like to thank him for his remarks. I agreed with everything he said.

The member from Ottawa South, if you really look at the big picture—and to the folks at home, we're talking about billions of dollars—whether it takes nine hours or 15 hours or 20 hours, in the big picture, if we can make one thing better with those extra hours, is that really—

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: I think every member here has brought something forward that might not be brought forward in committee, and if you don't believe that, why are you sitting here?

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Before I start my debate, I just wanted to make an announcement: My spouse is not a teacher. I think I'm about the only one in this building today whose spouse is not a teacher.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to this bill. I do want to commend my colleague from Cambridge for his work on this education file. I kind of admire him because he is such a critical thinker. He has jumped into this file with both feet and has made some very pertinent comments in this House regarding education in general and, in particular, this bill.

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Every time I hear him talk on the subject, it's clear that—as he himself is a former educator—the education of our young people is something he's passionate about. It's refreshing to take on our education system because, at the end of the day, the education of our children is vitally important to our economic competitiveness.

The apparatus by which we deliver education to our children, the body responsible for ensuring every child is able to reach their full potential, is the Ministry of Education. To provide some perspective on the scope and scale of our education system, let's consider a few facts. As of 2012-13, the number of students in Ontario was 2,031,205. That's a lot of children; it's also a lot of families that directly interact with our educational system.

Bill 122 talks a lot about education stakeholders—the teachers, the support workers. But it is as a parent—families with children in our education system comprise one of the largest stakeholder groups, and any piece of legislation must take into account their needs and requirements. The ministry is responsible for delivering something of value to Ontario.

The end resource we expect the ministry to produce is an educated group of young people. The quality of this process is measured by how well our children are educated in relation to the rest of the world. To produce this mass of educated young people, the ministry oversees 3,978 elementary schools and 913 secondary schools. The budget for education is \$21 billion, with a total capital investment of \$1.4 billion, which makes it the second-largest line item in the provincial budget. This is a very big ministry, and it's an important ministry.

Certainly from the PC perspective, we have expressed deep concern over the fiscal mismanagement of this government because we feel it threatens vital services like health and education. By the same token, for a ministry that spends as much money as the Ministry of Education, we want to make sure that we're getting a bang for the buck, a return on our investment.

When I say "a return on our investment," I'm not referring to simple money in and money out. A well-educated and skilled workforce generates many difficult-to-quantify benefits for our economy and society as a whole. Education as an investment is arguably the most important for the future of our province. For us legislators, it's imperative that we demand high performance from our education system, particularly when the investment is so large and there is so much at stake.

I will discuss the notion of return on our education dollars in a few minutes because I think it's important and also speaks to the underwhelming aim of Bill 122, which in essence is nothing more than a process bill.

What I want to do right now is frame the debate around Bill 122 in the way my colleague from Cambridge did when he spoke about the bill a few weeks ago. A few weeks back, our party helped push forward a programming motion to clear the decks on some legislation that we all agreed on. The purpose of this was to allow the government to come forward with substantive legislation and policy to help bolster the strength of our economy.

As I've mentioned previously, education is a key piece to the long-term strength and competitiveness of our economy. It is the foundation on which we built a vibrant and prosperous economy. So a substantial education bill is certainly something that fits into our overall theme and vision for this province.

What metrics should we use to evaluate the substance of an education bill and whether it fits into this overall scheme? Again, I defer to my thoughtful colleague from Cambridge, who has laid out two simple metrics on which to evaluate the quality of an educational bill.

First, we need to judge each piece of legislation based on how it improves test scores and quality of education of our students, as well as how it respects and allows our front-line educators to perform their job of providing quality education.

Second, since we've established that parents are one of the largest stakeholders in our education system, any proposed legislation must defer to them. It's important to consider what the parents are saying about a particular policy issue as they interact with the system every day.

So how does Bill 122 stack up against these evaluation metrics? It's pretty clear that this bill has absolutely nothing to do with the actual front-line education of our children. There's no program or curricular change that really impacts anything on that front. As for the parent input in the case of the collective bargaining process, it's virtually non-existent.

While I'm here, I'd like to talk a little bit more about parental input. During the public fights that occurred over

Bill 115, the debate that certainly dominated the headlines was between the province and the teachers' unions. Very simply, when it came to the province-wide agreements, they were the main players on either side of the bargaining table.

However, I'm sure that everyone here, like me, was inundated with many calls from parents in our ridings expressing their frustrations, opinions and ideas during that process. Whatever side of the debate these parents fell on—and there were plenty on both sides, I might add—they spoke solely from the perspective of the quality of their children's education. They speak from this perspective because they have the biggest, most singular stake in the game: to ensure that their children reach their full potential. Yet this collective voice gets relegated to the back burners, partly because they have no formal seat at the table.

Bill 122 defines its education partners narrowly to include the ministry, the teachers' federations and the school boards, yet the parents who sit on their children's school council are not considered a partner. So it is clear that our second metric to evaluate the substance of an education bill is not met.

At this point, let me be clear: I think it's a positive development to formalize the province's role in the collective bargaining process. The taxpayer must ultimately foot the bill for an agreement reached, and therefore it makes sense to have the province as a formal part of the process.

However, because this bill doesn't meet our two key requirements, it's noticeably underwhelming. It doesn't provide any measure that explicitly improves education. It effectively amounts to a change in the negotiation process—which, by the way, is a positive thing. However, considering the challenges our province faces economically, challenges that we intended this government to seriously address after passing that programming motion, this bill does not really measure up.

I'm starting to see a pattern here. Bill 105 is similar to Bill 122 in that it was introduced following the programming motion. It's a ministry bill and is intended as, or at least being sold as, a bill to address the monumental economic challenges Ontario faces. Bill 105, the Ministry of Finance's bill that will raise the health tax exemption for small businesses, is a bill we do support. However, when I spoke to Bill 105, I tried to lay out the disconnect between the bill's stated purpose of kick-starting private sector job creation and the fact that the total tax savings from the bill would only amount to \$975 per year, on average, for every single business. Again, it was a measure we supported, but we feel it is woefully inadequate to actually get the 600,000 people unemployed back to work.

That's what we have with Bill 122. It's a bill that we do think is a positive, albeit small, step. It doesn't enhance the front-line quality of our education and it doesn't bring the biggest stakeholder, the parents, into the fold.

This pattern of minor policy tweaks essentially amounts to the government getting into the boxing ring

with the issues facing our province. The only problem is that our government is a lightweight and the issues are major heavyweights. This is a missed opportunity, because with a more substantial bill we would be debating ideas on how to improve our education system. That's where education debates should be held.

Today, the Ministry of Education is spending \$8.5 billion more a year than in 2003. However, the most recent OECD data shows that Ontario's performance in mathematics has declined and we are now in 12th place. Mathematics education is becoming increasingly more vital in our digital age, and I think the member from Trinity-Spadina made the suggestion of having dedicated math teachers in the classroom to ensure the highest quality of education. I think that's a good idea and an idea worth having a discussion about. However, this bill doesn't afford us the opportunity to talk about ideas like this, ideas that are actually geared to enhancing the quality of education we provide our young people.

This brings me back to my original argument: Education is a vital investment, one for which the taxpayer provides a substantial sum of money and one in which the stakes are incredibly high. Debating the quality of the education relative to the dollars we spend is a worthy debate, a debate that has implications for the future of our education policy and our economy.

Given our shaky performance in various international studies, it is even more important that we focus our precious time here in the Legislature debating ways to increase our test scores and therefore enhance our overall educational process.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I appreciate the comments from the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London. However, the bottom line is this: We can stand here and criticize the education system in our province. We can criticize our test scores. We can do all these things, but I would ask the member: What are you going to do to fix it? Are you going to fix it just by legislation, or is it going to cost more money?

He calls it a vital part of our system. Well, the system needs more money. The funding formula is wrong. Too many schools are closing. Now he's questioning our test scores. Is it our teachers? Is it the curriculum? Is it the management? Is it the ministry? He's not narrowing it down to where the actual problems are that we can fix. But when you fix things, it costs money. So I don't know where the official opposition is going to get the money to throw more money into education when we've got, as he said, 600,000 people out of work.

1750

So you can't have your cake and eat it too. You're going to create jobs, you're going to improve the education system, and you want to improve the health system. Well, my friend, it all costs money. So when you come out with a fiscally responsible way to finance all these criticisms that you have, I'll be watching and listening.

I just got a form here; I believe it's called the Fedeli Focus on Finance. Well, let's have a look at Miller Money Management. What I'm saying is, I think that we can all play a role, Speaker, in improving these situations, but everyone seems to forget that no matter what you do, it costs money. When you're born, it costs money, you pay taxes, and when you die, it costs you money. So when they figure that one out, they'll be ahead of the game.

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

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to begin by taking to task, or, I should say, asking the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane if you understand the process of legislation. You keep saying that if we could just make the bill better—and that somehow arguing this endlessly here in this chamber would help you make the bill better. But the fact of the procedure is, the first chance we're going to get to make amendments is not going to be in the Legislature; it's going to be when that bill gets to committee. We cannot change this bill, even if we wanted to, as long as it's being debated here. So if you are really, really serious and you get the process—

Interjections.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: No, he said that. He said—

Interjections.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: No, no. I know exactly what I'm doing. All right.

It's a lesson for both the Tories and the NDP. How about that?

If you guys are really serious about making this a better bill, you ought to know you can't do this by arguing this. We've already argued it for 10 hours. Arguing it for the 11th hour won't make it better. The first chance we are going to get to fix it is going to be in committee, so if you are serious about it, let's get it to committee.

Otherwise, to all the viewers, all I can say is, they are playing games, they are playing politics, because you cannot make it a better bill here by arguing—

Interjections.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: —you have to get it to committee. Thank you.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's always so wonderful to be here at the 10-to-6 hour. It tends to get a little more fun around this place, and it's kind of—

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You should have been here at 10 to midnight in the old days.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Yes, I'll bet the old days were even more fun.

I want to comment on the member's 10-minute speech. He talked about the fact, and he opened the door to the fact, that our party has cleared the decks to be able to talk about jobs and the economy. We got rid of the tanning bed legislation—all very important legislation. The tanning bed, the door-to-door salespeople—we got rid of all of these.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: What about Bill 105?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Oh, I'm coming to 105. Don't worry.

We got rid of all of these, albeit important, bills that don't really drive the economy or have anything to do with creating jobs. We did that, and what do we see? The first bill that comes out from this government, after we cleared the decks so that there are no impediments in the way of talking about creating jobs and putting people back to work, was a bill to create a 1-800 number for animals. Again, it's a very important bill; however, not the kind of bill we cleared the decks for to create jobs in the economy—a 1-800 hotline for animals. Following quickly on its heels was the bill about smoking on patios—again, a very, very important bill. There's no question that there is a time and a place for these. But we've cleared the decks, Speaker, for these.

When they did finally bring a bill that may remotely have something to do with jobs and the economy, Bill 105, which we supported, they sent it to the wrong committee. Which committee did they send it to? Well, they did not send it to the finance committee. Instead, they sent it to the wrong committee. There's something wrong over there.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to stand in the House today. I was going to comment on the speech made by the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: However—

Mr. John Vanthof: —However, I would like to respond, through you, Speaker, to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville. I very well understand the process. I was elected by the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane to bring forward their views in this House. I do so at every opportunity.

Although this is a process bill, it's about education. Rural schools are very important in my riding. The fact that we can't get qualified people to come work in my riding because schools are closing is an extremely important issue in my riding. The fact is there are kids in my riding that can't have access to speech therapy. Someone comes and says, "Oh, yes. You need this service, but we can't provide it. We will see you three months from now." Those are things that have to be brought up in this House.

The reason I'm responding to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville and not to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London is because the issues have to be brought up in this House. I will continue to do that as long as I remain elected. I will always speak, at every opportunity, to the people on behalf of the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for London–Middlesex—

Interjection: Elgin–Middlesex–London.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): —Elgin–Middlesex–London has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his comments. I would like to thank the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville, even though she didn't really talk to me at all. It's all right; they haven't gotten my riding right all day. It's good. Member from Nipissing, thank you for your fine comments. Member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, you're the famous one that everyone wants to speak to. Maybe my final comments should be to you. However, I do stand with you on the fact of rural schools and the issues they're having.

It's not just a northern Ontario problem. I've got the French immersion school in my city of St. Thomas for the whole county of Elgin. We have one there, and it has been overcrowded because it's getting more popular to go to French immersion. Parents just got a note this week stating that if you live outside of St. Thomas from westward to the edge of Elgin county, next year all those kids that go to that school are now going to be put on an hour-long bus ride to Strathroy, which is out of my riding. It goes to Mr. McNaughton's riding. They're taking them to Strathroy because they have no plans on how to deal with the overcrowding, which they should have been working on years ago. But leadership comes from the top.

Mr. John Vanthof: The issue should be brought up in this House.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: It will be brought up in this House. I just thought it would be a pre-message in this debate today.

However, I do want to make a note that I didn't get to in my speech. I think a sunset clause does need to be added to this legislation so that we can review how well this legislation is going to work after the next round of negotiations. It's no use walking away from this legislation after it's done and then dealing with it five or six years down the road. If it's a failure, let's deal with it after the next round of negotiations. Put that sunset clause in there. It forces the government of the day, which I'm pretty sure is not going to be those across the way over there, to deal with a new form of collective bargaining and ensure that it's properly vetted out for the province of Ontario.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order number 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

PAN AM GAMES

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Elgin–Middlesex–London has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the minister responsible for the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games. The member has up to

five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister may reply for up to five minutes.

1800

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I would like to thank the minister for attending the late show and helping me out with my response.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise and address the inadequacy with which the minister of the Pan Am Games answered a question of mine two weeks ago during question period. I asked a simple question, a question that, quite frankly, given the record of this Liberal government's way of managing major projects, was reasonable. My question came from an exchange that I and my colleague had with the Minister of Transportation in the estimates committee.

We were questioning the minister on various things, and I asked, what was the budgeted cost for the Pan Am transit plan? As most of you know, the Union Pearson Express is a multi-million-dollar project whose completion is intended to coincide with the beginning of the Pan Am Games. This is a major project under the Pan Am Games transit plan. However, there are also a number of other smaller projects intended to meet the transit needs of the Pan Am Games.

My question regarding the total cost for these projects was met with a response that was, quite frankly, shocking and disappointing. He told me that he could not give an indication of what the total cost of such a transit plan will be. He went further and said that, with this project, he likely wouldn't have an idea of the final cost until well after the Pan Am Games. That is unconscionable to me. A vague ballpark figure would have been better than nothing. If he had pulled a number out of the air, it would have demonstrated that he had given more thought to the cost than he did.

The reason I take this so seriously is that I'm a taxpayer. Like everyone else in this province, I pay a chunk of my income, and my pharmacy pays a chunk of its income, to the government every year. It is the government's responsibility to direct these funds reasonably, honestly and transparently.

When I was working at my pharmacy before I became an MPP, I understood that money just didn't grow on trees. There was a very real system of money that came in and money that went out. Consequently, I would work hard every year with the employees at my pharmacy to develop a budget for the upcoming year. The actual figures at the end of the year could be higher or lower, but the budget figures provided a guide and target that we aimed to meet, because if we couldn't achieve our cost targets, we would lose money, and there was no magic source that we could tap for more money. Maybe that's why the Minister of Transportation didn't think he even needed a basic ballpark budget for the Pan Am transit plan: Regardless of what the cost will be, he thinks he can just go back to the taxpayer and ask for more.

So anyway, I was dissatisfied with the Minister of Transportation's dismissive attitude towards what I consider a very important function of government: proper

budget planning. But I figured, okay, this is the transit plan for the Pan Am Games, so maybe the minister of the Pan Am Games will have some idea of what the costs would be. That is why I posed my question to the minister of the Pan Am Games the other week. I figured that maybe, just maybe, the responsibility for the multi-million-dollar budget for Pan Am transit fell under his ministry. However, I was disappointed again.

The Minister of Tourism offered about as little information as the Minister of Transportation when it came to the budget for the Pan Am transit plan. If I can remind everyone, we're talking about millions and millions and millions of dollars, dollars that are collected from paycheques of Ontarians, paycheques that the average Ontarian works hard for, works long hours for and, in some cases, misses quality family time for.

People work hard for their money, and the very least the government could do is respect the money they collect from Ontarians by making decisions to spend that money wisely. But without a budget, I don't see how this is possible.

If what the Minister of Transportation said to me in committee about not knowing the cost of the transit plan until after the games are completed is true, he seems to imply that the budget process is too difficult. Do you know what I say to that? Tough. Budgeting is not an easy process, but it's necessary. It's necessary to set targets, and it's necessary to measure results.

Just by the scope and scale of all the cost overruns and hidden budgets that have emerged regarding Pan Am Games so far, I don't think I'm being unreasonable to demand that this government shape up and show me a budget for the Pan Am Games transit plan.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has up to five minutes to respond.

Hon. Michael Chan: I'm pleased to rise in the House to state for the record key facts about the costs of the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games, as the member opposite and his colleagues seem to be acting shocked and ignorant over facts that have been stated publicly and clearly numerous times since 2009.

Our government is committed to putting on the most transparent multi-sport games ever. Ontario, as the host jurisdiction, has various responsibilities. When a host jurisdiction responsibility is confirmed, we have stated it openly and publicly.

A good example is the athletes' village. From the beginning in 2009, we said this investment, as is common practice, would be a host jurisdiction responsibility and not part of the TO2015 organizing committee's budget to stage and deliver the specifics of the games. The opposition critic even acknowledged this fact in a news release this past spring. However, he continues to be shocked that it is a separate provincial investment.

In August, I was pleased to announce our \$42-million promotion, celebration and legacy strategy to extend the benefits of hosting the games to all in Ontario. Last month, as part of the PCL strategy, the Premier and I announced our \$3.5-million expansion of Ontario's trails

network. I am surprised that, similar to the case of the athletes' village, our opposition colleagues chose not to read a news release and instead claimed, again, ignorance.

Ontario, as a host jurisdiction, has many responsibilities, like a contribution of \$500 million to the TO2015 organizing committee's \$1.4-billion budget. The federal government, municipal governments and others also contribute. Another responsibility as a host jurisdiction is to establish a provincial office to oversee the government's investment in the games, as is normal practice. Another responsibility of Ontario as a host jurisdiction is to make appropriate and necessary investments in security and transportation.

Speaker, games planning is complex and large in scope, particularly when the games' footprint stretches across 14 municipalities. The Ministry of Transportation is working closely with the secretariat, the TO2015 organizing committee, Metrolinx, 14 host local governments and security planners to develop an integrated transportation plan to keep people moving and provide safe and efficient travel during the games.

Security planning is led by an integrated security unit of the Ontario Provincial Police, composed of municipal, federal and provincial policing partners. Our priority is to protect the safety of our athletes, visitors and residents, and we will be prepared to take any measures necessary to ensure their safety. Premature speculation of costs and plans undermines a very complex undertaking and hurts our credibility on the international stage.

Ontario is well ahead in the planning stages when compared to other host jurisdictions whose plans were typically finalized 12 to 18 months prior to the games. We are committed to making these the most open and transparent games. Our government brought the organizing committee under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. We require senior executives to publicly disclose their salaries on a yearly basis, and we will continue to communicate our progress on the games to the public.

The false numbers that the opposition critic continues to suggest will hurt the games, hurt businesses, hurt Ontario jobs, hurt partnerships and trade, and hurt our cultural and economic ties with 41 PASO nations. Statements like these are disrespectful, dampen the spirit of our athletes and serve to diminish the legacy of the games. We look forward to hosting the world in 2015 and hope that our opposition colleagues can rise above the political games and join us in celebrating all of the benefits—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Thank you. That concludes the time available.

MANUFACTURING JOBS

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Premier on the

closing of the Heinz plant in Leamington. You have five minutes.

1810

Mr. Rick Nicholls: On November 18—that would have been yesterday—I actually had addressed the Premier during question period with regard to the closing of the H.J. Heinz Co. in Leamington. Unfortunately, I was very dissatisfied with the response she had provided me.

When we take a look at Heinz, Heinz announced last Thursday that it would be closing after 104 years of business in Leamington and the surrounding area. They were all stunned. Also, though, I see filling in for the Premier this evening is the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. In truth, I do appreciate his efforts, because in fairness, and I always am one to give credit where credit is due, he did reach out to me on the Thursday—and I thank you for that—shortly after we had heard. I was in between media calls and happened to receive the minister's phone call. I do appreciate his efforts and his call.

But again, after one of the most significant and devastating events in my riding's history, the people of Chatham–Kent–Essex looked to the Premier, who performs a double duty as Minister of Agriculture and Food, and they waited for a response. They heard nothing. Instead, they watched as she scrambled to score what we would call “press” by commenting on the city of Toronto's current issues. But yesterday, I did call on the Premier for action. I'd hoped for some specifics on what the province would do to help the people of Leamington who are losing their livelihoods.

I also handed her a letter by hand which I will now read into the record. It states:

“Dear Premier Wynne,

“Last week my community of Leamington suffered a devastating blow when Heinz announced that they are closing their plant after 104 years. The economic impact will be far-reaching when you factor in the job losses, damage to the supply chain and contracts of local tomato farmers.

“On a day when over 740 full-time”—and another 350 seasonal—“employees learned they were losing their jobs, you chose instead to focus on Toronto mayor Rob Ford. This is particularly upsetting given that you have chosen to be the Minister of Agriculture and Food, and the closure of the plant, one of our largest food processors, will have a huge impact on farmers in our area.

“Because this issue requires immediate attention, I ask that you”—and I will cite the four major points:

“(1) Come to Leamington by the end of the year to meet with the hundreds of employees and farmers who are losing their livelihood;

“(2) Have the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities set up a briefing as soon as possible to talk to workers and provide information on programs to help them with retraining and other options:

“(3) Have the Ministry of Agriculture and Food set up a briefing as soon as possible for our farmers to provide information on alternative crops and to talk about programs to help them transition; and

“(4) Take immediate action to change your government’s policies that contributed to Heinz deciding to close the plant, such as the spiralling cost of hydro and the increasing red tape, so that our other businesses can grow and no other community will go through what we are experiencing.

“Premier, this closure will impact every part of our community. Not only was the plant a major employer for the entire area, it resulted in thousands of spinoff jobs. It contributed significantly to” the municipality of Leamington’s “government’s revenue and their ability to deliver services. It was a market for our tomato growers and a vital part of our agriculture ministry.

“I ask that, as soon as possible, you take the four steps outlined above to help our community as we start trying to look towards the future.”

Speaker, that was a letter I hand-delivered to the Premier just yesterday.

I realize that question period isn’t always the best place to get detailed answers to issues, so I wanted to give the Premier 24 hours to go over the details of my letter and question. While I realize that she’s very busy, it’s unfortunate that she is not here this evening to address the question directly. I’m sure that the people of Leamington, as well as the rest of my constituents in Chatham–Kent–Essex, are disappointed by the fact that the Premier was a no-show, after failing to address the issue last Thursday. I don’t want it to sound like she could be running from—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Excuse me, but you cannot refer to someone’s absence.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I retract that statement; my apologies.

In closing, I’d like to speak on behalf of my constituents. I call on the Premier to—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We’ve run out of time. I’d ask for a response. Thank you.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the parliamentary assistant to the Premier, I want to thank the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex for all his efforts and all his concern. I know he is deeply concerned. I know this is not an easy situation for the people of Leamington, and I know that the Premier shares his concern. As she said yesterday, she’s very disappointed with Heinz’s decision to close its Leamington operations in mid-2014 as part of a broader, company-wide operational review that impacts plants in the United States as well as the Leamington facility.

I will try my best to convey the Premier’s comments this evening for you.

The agri-food industry in the Leamington area and the workers at Heinz have made a significant contribution to Heinz and to Ontario’s economy over the years, and we’re all well aware of that. This government’s first concern is for the workers, the growers and the families

affected by the Heinz decision. We will ensure that Leamington and the surrounding area are taking full advantage of regional economic development programs and other provincial supports.

Multiple ministries are working together on the ground to ensure that the community is supported through this very difficult time.

I know that the Ministry of Agriculture and Food’s rapid response team is working with the growers on the ground. Over the weekend, local OMAF staff were in Leamington to participate in meetings with affected stakeholders, to hear community concerns and to work with officials to determine what’s needed to address those concerns.

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is working to set up a community service action plan. They have been in contact with all of the local service providers to ensure that they’re geared up and prepared for the closure in June.

The Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment is working with local business leaders and city officials to answer any questions they may have, as well as encouraging them to apply for regional funds.

Ontario has a strong, reputable agri-food sector. The Premier has been working, and will continue to work, with industry, with AMO and with the alliance of food processors to help the food processing industry grow and seize new market opportunities at home and globally.

The federal decision to review regulations around standardized container sizes has not helped Ontario’s business environment. Should the proposed changes be implemented, they could make the province less attractive to existing companies and potential international investors. The Premier has raised this government’s and stakeholders’ concerns with her federal counterpart, Minister Ritz, on numerous occasions. Most recently, the Premier raised this issue at the November meeting of the Council of the Federation.

The industry has warned that moving in this direction will have dire consequences for the ongoing competitiveness of the food processing and packaging sectors in Ontario, including job losses, business closures and lack of investment.

The Ontario government has provided \$50,000 in funding to the University of Windsor to develop an economic impact analysis, providing a better understanding of the impacts.

Across the value chain, Ontario’s agri-food sector employs more than 700,000 people and generates \$34 billion in economic activity for our province’s economy, and that is very significant. Ontario is home to one of North America’s largest food processing sectors, with 3,000 businesses that employ more than 95,000 people, and I have some of them in my own riding.

Hon. Michael Chan: Those are big numbers.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Yes. Food processing in Ontario is really a vital industry.

This government sees the agri-food industry not just as an important subsector but as a major factor in Ontario’s

economy, a driving force that has the full support of our government. Our government is going to invest in people, invest in infrastructure and create a dynamic and innovative business climate where agri-food businesses can succeed. In turn, the Premier has made a personal commitment to do what she can to help the industry to reach their targets as both Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food. As the government, we will focus our support on those who contribute to this vision and focus on growth.

1820

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Kenora–Rainy River has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Transportation concerning lack of highway maintenance in northwestern Ontario. The member has up to five minutes.

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Thank you, Speaker. As you just mentioned, earlier today I did raise the issue of highway maintenance and the problems we've had right across northwestern Ontario this winter—not just this winter but the problems that we had last winter and how that has really affected people living their day-to-day lives in northwestern Ontario.

I want to thank the parliamentary assistant for coming here tonight. It's a very important issue, and I appreciate you taking the time to talk about it. I do hope that you will bring back some of the concerns I raise tonight to the minister.

On that note, I should also mention that, even though I am here to express a bit of dissatisfaction with the answer I received, I was encouraged to hear that it is a priority for the minister. He expressed an interest in coming to Kenora–Rainy River to meet with, he said, the contractors. We do have multiple contractors, and I would like to set up that meeting as soon as possible.

I'd also like to have a bit of a disclaimer. I don't want to paint all contractors with the same brush. We have some contractors who are doing a relatively good job in Kenora–Rainy River. We have other contractors—one in particular has the contract for the largest part of my riding and is very seriously and very obviously not doing a very good job. It's unfortunate, but what we need to do is we need to have a discussion to make sure that we have that particular contractor living up to its obligations.

I also want to say, too, that this is a serious issue. This is not an issue that I'm trying to score any political points with. It's something that, quite simply, my office has been flooded with. When I'm going about the riding, attending events and talking to people, it's one of the single biggest issues that I've been hearing right now: that people are afraid to go out onto the highway. There are so many people who live outside of city centres, and they have to commute just to come in to medical appointments, get groceries, go to work. They're afraid to do that.

This past week, in the constituency break, I went to Kenora twice. I went to Fort Frances twice. I went to Rainy River. I went to Emo. I probably put close to 3,000 kilometres on my car. It's just me, and I've travelled all these roads. I can say that we had a little bit of freezing rain that happened about November 9 or 10. Travelling on Highway 502 exactly one week later, we still had that same amount of ice. The only ice that had dissipated a bit was just because of the weather. We're hearing stories from people who know people who work for Transfield Services that Highway 502 is just not a priority, and we're hearing of more and more of these cases. I've heard that there was a total of 10 collisions, and I've heard it's as high as 15, between the Manitoba border to Vermillion Bay and Ignace, and that's just with a little bit of snow.

Highways have been closed for hours and hours on end, and when they do open up, people are expecting those roads to be navigable, and what they're experiencing is just a horrifying situation.

As I mentioned earlier, there seems to be a lack of foresight. There doesn't seem to be work that's being done proactively on the roads. For instance, salt isn't being put down when the contractors and anybody living in the north knows that there's going to be a problem. They're not taking advantage of that small window where the weather is warm enough where they can use some salt or they can start using some sand. That would oftentimes head off the issue before it really becomes an issue.

I've heard from a lot of people that last year was the worst year in history in my riding, and this is coming from people who are quite accustomed to bad road conditions. It's not normal and it's not acceptable to have things like 14 transports that are involved in a pileup. Just imagine if there was a car in the middle of that mix; it wouldn't work out very well at all. These are some of the issues that people have raised.

As I said, there was really bad weather over the last couple of days. I have three staff who work in my Dryden office; two of them were not able to come in to work because of the road conditions. One staff was able to, and she said she was inundated all day long by people calling from across the region.

My point is simply that people are frustrated and that the system doesn't work—the system of self-policing. I think that's probably the biggest piece, in addition to the fact that these contractors are in it to make money and so they're cutting corners and they're not putting down the salt and they're not putting down the sand as they should be.

I look forward to the minister coming up to Kenora–Rainy River and sitting down with myself and a contractor. I look forward to that happening as soon as possible, and I hope that the minister will contact me right away.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes.

Mr. Mike Colle: I want to thank the member from Kenora–Rainy River. I think she has brought this forward in a very sincere and very positive way. I know she is really speaking on behalf of her constituents, who have every right to be concerned about road safety, considering the conditions that mean life or death for people. It is a very, very serious issue, and I certainly guarantee to her that I will pass on, in person, your concerns to the minister.

I know that we've been dealing with, in fact, some of the winter service levels in estimates, because the Minister of Transportation is before us. I know that when the member from Timmins–James Bay was talking about road conditions up his way in Attawapiskat and so forth, I asked that the maps be brought to the committee so we knew what the member was talking about. I find that very helpful. He mentioned Highway 502, I guess basically from Highway 11 up to Dryden, and the conditions. I think that gives us a better picture as members because we don't know how large this province is and people forget that it could probably take you I don't know how many hours of driving to get to Fort Frances or Rainy River. But it's a heck of a long way, and it's—

Ms. Sarah Campbell: It's about 20.

Mr. Mike Colle: Pardon me?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Twenty.

Mr. Mike Colle: Twenty hours? Yes, 20 hours. You could get to Florida, probably, quicker than going there. They just have no idea how big this province is. Especially, again, in winter, when people have to travel—they have to go to work—and the transport trucks have to deliver their goods, it is not a matter of choice: “Well, I'm not going to go today because the roads are icy.”

I certainly will pass on your very good suggestions about meeting with the contractors and seeing if we can get the minister to visit because, as you said, there seems to be one contractor that seems to be problematic and is not working up to standard, and perhaps the others are. But I think it would help to have the minister engaged in this, and if he can't come up, at least to get a senior MTO official there to ensure that the contractor is meeting their

obligations, which they're getting well paid for. I think what you're doing as an MPP is very important because, whether as ministry officials or the minister, it's hard to get an on-the-ground view of what's happening. I think your passing this on to the ministry officials here in Toronto will help to connect the reality of your part of Ontario to the people down here at MTO.

As you know, generally MTO has a very serious interest in road safety. Their tradition is to take this stuff seriously because they are the front-line people for the most part. A lot of them live in those parts of Ontario and have family and friends all throughout there, so for them it's not just a job. That's why I'm going to make sure I pass this on, especially—the fact is that last year there were not very good outcomes. The minister mentioned, I think, in committee, that there are 52 new, additional pieces of snow removal equipment going into the field, and to see if they're there and on the road would help. But on the other hand, if a contractor is not meeting their obligations, all the equipment in the world isn't going to help make the road safer.

As you said, I'll also pass on the fact is that we take preventative measures to ensure that you're out there preventing things from happening, rather than reacting after the fact, when it's too late. We shouldn't have conditions where we have 10- or 12-truck pileups happening.

Again, I think the member from Kenora–Rainy River, as she always does, raises this in an objective and sincere way, and I will do my best, as the parliamentary assistant, to pass on the importance of her question and her request to the minister. If I have to talk to MTO officials myself—they're all in committee now, which is good—in fact, I'll even do that, because they're going to be back at estimates tomorrow. I'll pass on your concerns again, as the member from Timmins–James Bay has already about some of the issues he had.

Again, thank you for bringing that forward this evening.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1830.

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Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
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McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Milloy, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Government Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation

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Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
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Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors / Ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Shurman, Peter (PC)	Thornhill	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / Président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Agriculture and Food / Ministre de l'Agriculture et de l'Alimentation Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Government / Chef du gouvernement Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Vacant	Niagara Falls	

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Laura Albanese, Steve Clark
Mike Colle, Joe Dickson
Rob Leone, Amrit Mangat
Taras Natyshak, Jerry J. Ouellette
Michael Prue
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Soo Wong
Steven Del Duca, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Kevin Daniel Flynn
Douglas C. Holyday, Mitzie Hunter
Monte McNaughton, Michael Prue
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

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permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Donna H. Cansfield
Sarah Campbell, Donna H. Cansfield
Grant Crack, Dipika Damerla
John Fraser, Michael Harris
Peggy Sattler, Laurie Scott
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

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Lorenzo Berardinetti, Percy Hatfield
Mitzie Hunter, Jim McDonell
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

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la justice**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Phil McNeely
Teresa J. Armstrong, Steven Del Duca
Bob Delaney, Frank Klees
Jack MacLaren, Phil McNeely
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qadri
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

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Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack
Vic Dhillon, Garfield Dunlop
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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des comptes publics**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, Lorenzo Berardinetti
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely
Norm Miller, John O'Toole
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**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
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John Fraser, Monte Kwinter
Jane McKenna, Rick Nicholls
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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la politique sociale**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Chudleigh
Bas Balkissoon, Ted Chudleigh
Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Ernie Hardeman
Rod Jackson, Helena Jaczek
Paul Miller
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Select Committee on Developmental Services / Comité spécial
sur les services aux personnes ayant une déficience
intellectuelle**

Chair / Présidente: Laura Albanese
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Cheri DiNovo, Christine Elliott
Mitzie Hunter, Rod Jackson
Sylvia Jones, Monique Taylor
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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