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Tuesday 26 November 2013

Mardi 26 novembre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Tuesday 26 November 2013

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mardi 26 novembre 2013

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

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 25, 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 Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm honoured to rise this morning, on behalf of the residents of Dufferin–Caledon, to discuss the bill before us. This morning we'll be debating Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

This bill was introduced last month by the Minister of Education and deals with the collective bargaining process in the education sector. In essence, what Bill 122 sets out to do is formalize the collective bargaining process in a way that gives the provincial government a direct role in collective bargaining rounds.

What we're not doing this morning, which I wish we were, is discussing jobs and the economy, but I suppose I shouldn't be surprised.

After all, the provincial government does foot the cost of the education sector, an investment which exceeds \$20 billion, so, certainly, it would make sense for the provincial government to have a formal say in the collective bargaining process.

For the sake of perspective, however, I think it is helpful to consider how the current government has been approaching the collective bargaining process thus far. Previously, during the 2005 and 2008 rounds of collective bargaining in the education sector, the provincial government established a voluntary framework, in discussions with school boards and teacher federations. Under this model, you basically had the provincial government set the tone, set the goals, for negotiating, and then individual boards negotiated with their local

union chapters. This, of course, changed in the latest round of bargaining, and in that case, we saw the provincial government attempt to negotiate a memorandum of understanding directly with the unions. Ultimately, we know how that process ended up, and it wasn't great.

So from a process perspective, Bill 122 may be onto something. I say this because Bill 122 is rooted in the concept that the provincial government ought to have a recognized role in the negotiation of collective agreements in the education sector. That being said, I do have some concerns with the new structure being proposed under Bill 122.

What Bill 122 proposes to do is to create a two-tier collective bargaining process in the education sector, with legally defined roles for the province, trustees, associations and unions. The collective bargaining process will effectively be divided into central and local issues, with negotiation over central issues happening with the provincial government involved, and negotiation over local issues happening at the local level with local school boards.

Central issues are defined as issues with a province-wide impact or those that could result in a significant impact on the implementation of government policy. A final qualifier for a central issue is if it could result in a significant cost for one or more school boards. Issues of this nature would be discussed at the central negotiating table, where the provincial government and school board representatives would be on one side and teacher federations or unions on the other.

All other issues would continue to be bargained by local school boards with local employee representatives. Any local issues could be negotiated concurrently with the central bargaining process.

Finally, when both tiers were finished negotiating, the provisions of a central agreement combined with the locally negotiated provisions would make up the final collective agreement. Also, a central settlement would only be finalized if all three parties—the provincial government, the trustee associations and the unions—all agree to the centrally negotiated terms.

That is the summary of a process Bill 122 aims to implement if it's enacted.

Now, I can't help but comment, Speaker, that while Bill 122 may have some merits, as I've stated, the bottom line is that it is still a relatively modest process bill. What I mean is that we've got some legitimate issues both in the education sector and in other areas across Ontario as well, particularly relating to jobs and the economy, yet this Liberal government seems perpetually stalled in a

mundane process-type of initiative. One only needs to consider the fact that this government has struck 37 panels to study any number of topics before the government. Talk about undue process. It really is quite shocking: 37 panels, 26 ministers, one Premier, and not even a glimmer of a credible jobs plan between all of them.

Regarding the education sector specifically, though, I want to touch on a topic that I am particularly interested in. I think this is a particularly unique topic, because it demonstrates how legislation like Bill 122, while fine enough, really does miss the mark on some of the more important and pressing issues. The issue I'm referring to is the standard practice of retired teachers being able to come back and serve as occasional teachers in their area. This practice in general is problematic, I believe. If a teacher, who may have been teaching for 25 or 30 years, decides to retire, why then are they allowed to both collect their retirement benefits and at the same time teach occasionally? The reason this is so problematic is because the occasional-teacher pool, if I may call it that, is really the primary route for a full-time job for all of our young teaching professionals. I am not by any means saying we should be forcing teachers to retire. But what I am saying is that when a teacher has made the decision to retire, I think they should retire and not go back to occasional teaching. This is because when they do, they, of course, take an occasional-teaching opportunity away from a new teacher.

With relation to Bill 122, this is perhaps an issue that could be negotiated at the central bargaining table under the new system; I'm not entirely sure. But the point is, with thousands of young, aspirational professionals who are graduating every year and eager to get in the classroom and teach our students, they need that experience and they need to do their time and learn their trade, so to speak. But when you have really just one avenue for them to take and it is also open to teachers who have their entire careers behind them, I think there is an equity problem here, particularly, as I mentioned earlier, when you consider that there always seems to be this focus on seniority-based systems like regulation 274, as opposed to merit-based systems in this field. We could very well have an incredible young person who is an amazing teacher, and yet they aren't getting their chance because you have retired teachers filling the occasional-teaching opportunities in their communities. There we have an example of a potential initiative that could lead to more job creation in Ontario for our young people, yet would I ever expect to see such an initiative from this Liberal government? The answer is no, not really.

This government has fumbled the ball so many times, has missed the mark so badly on the economy, that I honestly don't know if expectations could be any lower for the Liberal government, and that is quite sad.

You see, the reason the answer is no, Speaker, is because our leader, Tim Hudak, met with the Premier and proposed a compromise on a number of bills before the Legislature so that we could address the job crisis in

Ontario and the Premier agreed. Our leader said, "Let's clear the decks, let's agree on what we agree on, pass the bills and focus on the economy," and the Premier agreed. Yet here we are two months later: Nothing; no jobs plan, no credible progress on the economy. If anything, things have gotten worse.

0910

You would think, considering the Premier's agreement with my leader, Tim Hudak, that jobs must be the priority, that you'd see a focus on job-creating legislation. You would think that in any area of government, the number one question that the Premier and her ministers would be asking is, "Will this help job creation or hurt job creation?" That's what it's all about, or at least that's what it should be all about. In fact, the only thing the Liberal government points out as their jobs plan is a bill that actually raises taxes for the very types of companies that are closing their doors across Ontario. The lack of awareness is shocking.

So here we are today, debating Bill 122, yet another process-related piece of legislation, in which the Liberals have decided to basically focus on how they can influence future labour agreements. A worthy goal? Sure. But a government's number one priority at a time when thousands of manufacturing jobs are being lost across the province? I think not.

When we are faced with a job crisis of the magnitude that is currently before Ontario, how can the government possibly justify putting job creation on the back burner and focusing on legislation like Bill 122? Bill 122 sets out to tweak the collective bargaining process in the education sector, while what the government could have focused on is the issues of retirees using precious occasional-teaching slots, that I mentioned earlier as an example. Maybe then we could help job creation by helping our young graduates and future teachers get the experience they need so that they can get full-time positions and begin to build a life for themselves.

Ultimately, Bill 122 does seem like a fair initiative, if only to ensure that future governments actually interested in doing something other than having conversations can influence future agreements.

That being said, there are many more pressing issues this government should be focused on, and the first one among them is creating jobs in the province of Ontario.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to comment on the member from Dufferin-Caledon's 10-minute hit on Bill 122, although I just can't help but reflect on what happened in this place yesterday, when the PC caucus called for unanimous consent to adjourn the debate on 122, and the Liberals, all afternoon, said, "We've had enough debate on 122." Yet, after a half-hour of bells, the Liberals and the PCs came into this place and voted down their own motion and then voted to extend the debate, and so here we are.

It is a process bill; the member from Dufferin-Caledon is absolutely right. But there's definitely a whole new

level of games going on in this House, which actually adds to the cynicism of politics in the province of Ontario, which we all must accept responsibility for.

Bill 122 will provide some clarity around negotiations and collective bargaining going forward. I mean, that's the goal of this piece of legislation. It's needed because there was a huge breach of trust when 115 was imposed on the entire education sector in the fall of 2012. The peace-and-stability piece that I think we're not talking about, which lends itself to the kinds of conversations or initiatives that the member from Dufferin–Caledon wants to put on the front burner, which is an education system which meets the 21st-century needs of students in Ontario—peace and stability matters. Because we lost trust in the collective bargaining process in the fall of 2012, under Bill 115—which both parties participated in—we need 122.

We want to get this to committee. We want to make it better. We want to make it stronger, and we want to bring some clarity to it. So we look forward to that happening.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The Attorney General.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Let me get this straight: The Tories are in favour of this bill; the NDP is in favour of the bill; the government obviously is, because we introduced the bill. Everybody thinks it's a good idea. So why have 50 members spoken on a bill that we all agree to? Why are the opposition filibustering this? Let's get the bill to committee.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I have not; I want an opportunity.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Yes, you want an opportunity. Sure, I'm all in favour of free and open democratic debate. But, you know, enough is enough. We all agree on this bill. Let's get it to committee. Let's get the work done. We all agree with this. Stop your filibustering. Let's get down to work for the people of Ontario, which you're not doing right now with your filibustering.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I'm surprised by the feigned outrage by the Attorney General. A man of his experience should know that democracy is the right to speak. That's what he's trying to deny the members of the Conservative Party: the right to stand up for their constituents.

More importantly, the real issue here this morning should be about the jobs plan. That's what we're so upset about. This government is literally getting away with murder in terms of the lack of attention to the economy and jobs in Ontario, and the member from Dufferin–Caledon said it very, very well.

Everyone here believes education is the greatest gift that our children should have access to, and we certainly would say that for sure.

My wife is a retired teacher, and now she's a school trustee. The reason she's a school trustee is because she couldn't justify supply teaching. We had two daughters-in-law, both of whom had teaching degrees—a master's degree, I think—with no job. So my wife went on and

became a school trustee. She's probably chair of special ed because that's what she was very involved in.

My daughter was a high school teacher as well. She was so frustrated with the system that she's now a teacher in London, England. In fact, she's a department head, I think in science or humanities or something like that.

Hon. John Gerretsen: You should be proud of it.

Mr. John O'Toole: I am, but this system that exists today disappointed her.

Even more importantly, it comes down to, this is still part of the jobs and the economy plan. It's people without jobs and jobs without people. It means the educational system isn't producing the right people with the right skills for the economy we currently have.

Bill 122 is really a governance bill that centralizes negotiation and eliminates the real function of the school boards. I think there's a lot of agreement with that.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Then your wife would be out of a job.

Mr. John O'Toole: My wife would be happy to be out of a job, I'm sure.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I want to maybe provide some more clarity to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo's last comments.

We have the Liberal government saying, "Let's get on with this." We've had about 12 or 13 hours of debate on this issue. We've got the Tories saying, "This is democracy, and we have the right to debate the issue." All the while, they're adjourning debate and ringing bells. Then they get up and vote against their own motion to adjourn debate, and you guys actually vote with them, when you actually could have adjourned debate and ended it yesterday—and all about this process bill that—I don't even know why this bill is here, to tell you the truth.

I don't know why the government couldn't just have sat down and negotiated terms and conditions for central bargaining with the unions. There are other sectors in this province where people sit down across the table from each other. They negotiate a process, and they get on with life, and they move into that central negotiation process.

Democracy is great. We all have the opportunity to stand up here and talk, but if we really want to talk about the issues, I don't know why we continue to adjourn the debate or try to adjourn the House. It certainly isn't in the best interests of any of us to do that.

I have to tell you, last week when they were having that reception here for, I think, the fallen firefighters, it was quite disturbing to have their reception interrupted for the first 30 minutes because we had the people on our right here ringing the bells. I think you need to think about that and what's going on here in the House when you actually move into that process.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Dufferin–Caledon has two minutes to respond.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: To the Attorney General: It is my job to represent the views of my constituents in Dufferin–

Caledon. I'm proud to stand up and debate this legislation. I'd like to have been talking about jobs and the economy, but this is what has been brought before us; this is what the Liberal House leader has chosen for us to debate this morning, and I will do that proudly.

To the NDP: I don't need any lectures from the NDP about loss of trust. The one and only time they have ever been in government, they ripped up thousands of agreements. It was called the social contract. So please don't tell me about loss of trust. When you guys were in government—you remember the social contract? You were the ones who ripped up thousands and thousands of contracts. You lost the faith of your members; you lost the faith of Ontarians. Don't lecture me about loss of trust, please. You don't have any credibility on the issue.

You want to talk about jobs and economy? Bring forward some legislation that will actually improve the lives of young people in Ontario, instead of these minor-process pieces of legislation that, quite frankly, the only reason we're doing is because you messed it up the last time when you brought forward the education bill. You could have helped that. You could have solved that at the committee level. You didn't do it. You missed it and now we have to go through an entire legislative process. I'm sorry that you messed up, but I'm not going to give you a free ride on it. You want to talk about jobs and the economy? We'd be happy to discuss those pieces of important legislation. Thank you.

0920

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate here today. We should have healthy debate on these topics—not like the Liberals, who don't seem to want to have to debate, and I guess the third party is not going to join in the debate on Bill 122 today either, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

This bill will provide clarity, greater clarity anyway, for the different parties that are involved in collective bargaining in the education sector. It's a good thing that there is an intention to establish this clear framework for collective bargaining in the education sector. We certainly all remember what's gone on in the past year and a half. But by having a two-tier collective bargaining process with legally defined roles for the province, the trustee association—the member from Durham mentioned that his wife is on the trustee association—and unions, students will hopefully not have to suffer through that great debacle like the one that took place in the last rounds of negotiations under Dalton McGuinty.

I want what is best for our children in Ontario. I want to have kids who go to elementary and high schools every day in the province—I want them to feel comfortable that they're getting the best possible education and environment that is conducive to their needs. I want parents across this province to not have to worry about what might happen to the school year when another round of bargaining is under way between the school

boards and unions. I don't want parents to have to worry about whether or not they'll be able to participate in their favourite sport in the fall. You know, in Coboconk, at Ridgewood Public School in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, the parents went out and did a Burma Shave on the side of the road, they were so frustrated that the teachers would not bring extracurricular activities back into that school and their children were suffering. I don't blame them for being at the end of their rope in frustration. Good for them for taking that on.

Ontario universities do have the ability to give out some athletic scholarship money, so it would not be fair to limit the athletic abilities of those who have a chance to receive financial assistance due to athletic merit, which starts in public school and goes into high school. I also don't want those who have worked hard in any other extracurricular activity to have to worry about whether or not they will be able to fulfill their wishes of doing so.

Just as important, some students who may require a letter of certification or a signature from a teacher to assist in obtaining that scholarship money might not receive them, as happened in 2012—very devastating for lots of families in that area. There are stories of students who needed to have these types of letters in order to receive financial compensation to ease the burden of the increasing tuition fees across Ontario universities. At that point in 2012, teachers wouldn't produce the letters, once the unions had advised for there to be no extracurricular activities supervised by teachers. It was a tragedy that parents still tell me about every day back in the riding.

This is the road that I don't want our students to go down again. It's not fair to our children. I'm hoping that this legislation will prevent such actions from ever occurring again.

But while this bill does address the importance of establishing the two-tiered system for collective bargaining, it fails to address some of the more important issues that the education system is dealing with currently. I know that it has been spoken about many times in the Legislature. My colleague from Cambridge brought in a motion to amend regulation 274. This regulation must be amended so we can hire the best and brightest that our province has to offer with respect to teachers. Your Liberal government snuck in this regulation back when they introduced Bill 115. Why anyone would think that only hiring based on seniority instead of merit is a good thing is beyond me and beyond many people across Ontario. The parents are talking about that in my riding—and also the young teachers that can't get jobs even though they are incredibly qualified, talented and fit in to the certain schools that they need to be in.

This is a government that has a commitment to restore their relationship with their partners in education and has recently claimed to have taken steps to help 1,500 young people in Ontario find jobs. That's a very interesting number, Madam Speaker, because I have some alarming numbers that prove that this government is not helping our young people get jobs in this province. It also means that our children are missing out on some of the brightest

and most innovative minds that Canada has to offer. The unemployment rate for new teachers was recently pegged at 37%. That's over a third of our recent teachers' college grads that can't find any work in Ontario. Not surprisingly, I think it's about 200 applicants for every position that opens up in my area.

Recent promises have potentially hurt young teachers in some of our biggest school boards. If retiring teachers do not decide to leave after November 30, they are to receive a \$5,000 incentive. Why would this government allow a date so far into the school year? This hurts young teachers in Ontario. Instead of knowing by the time the first term starts in September, young teachers in Ontario have been left wondering if there is a chance they can get hired. This is odd timing, especially since many young teachers need to have the time to develop relationships with students right from the start of the semester. Having a new teacher start midway through a school year disrupts the classroom, and a different teaching style may not be the best for some students.

Recent numbers also indicate that while it's hard for young people to find teaching jobs now, many are being discouraged to apply even to become a teacher. The University of Windsor, for example, over the past decade has seen a 75% decrease in teachers' college applications. It's a significant drop of applications for that university. Our young people are hearing too much about the doom and gloom of trying to find a position in Ontario. So we're educating them and—I don't blame them—they go to other countries. Part of the Liberal jobs plan is we're educating our young people for the US or Korea; there are lots of young teachers I know that go to Korea to teach. You only have a one-in-eight chance of getting a job in Ontario if you're a graduating teacher right now. So of course there's going to be an influx of teachers heading out of the province to either other provinces or other countries. We're failing our students that way.

What has been in the newspapers recently is never getting enough attention, I don't think: math, which is an important subject for our students to excel in and develop interest in. The year 2013 marked the fifth year in a row that our students have showed a decline in math skills. Just 57% of students in 2013 met the provincial standards of the EQAO math testing, down from 63% in 2009. It's an amazingly low number; I don't know how we plan on growing our province if our students are not up to par in math. The education minister is quoted as saying, "I think that the academic background of a lot of our elementary teachers is more in the arts." She goes on to say, "They don't necessarily have an extensive background themselves in math and science." Well, that's probably true, but we need to deal with math so that teachers have the same comfort level with teaching math as they do reading and writing. It's critical for our children and their futures, especially in this technology-advanced world, and for our economy to grow. We're failing our students in math also.

So why is this government focused on a bill for collective bargaining when our children are struggling so

much in the classroom? We have the young people that are technically inclined; we have the young people that could effectively teach math to our children and help develop their minds in a technically inclined way, but again, this government wants to hire teachers based on their seniority, not based on how they might be able to teach math. It's a serious problem. It can't be ignored. We've been fighting for it over here to try and get the best teachers to give the best education to our students in the province of Ontario.

Minister Sandals, the Minister of Education, claims that the proposed bill here is "groundbreaking legislation." Who exactly is this groundbreaking legislation for? Is it the union, the negotiator? What about the actual students and teachers, who do not have much of a say in the bargaining process itself but are the ones who are most affected?

We have had a lot of problems that could be addressed in this Legislature. We want the best for our children, but at what cost? The Liberals are trying to put a collective bargaining process bill quickly through the Legislature, instead of focusing on getting the best teachers possible for our kids. So, frankly, I'm shocked that one of the 37 panels that the government has constructed has been unable to put forward a recommendation to help our students get ahead. It's a government of panels, there's no question. Anyway, I am digressing.

0930

What we need to do, what is best for the students of Ontario in order to benefit all of us—we can't afford to put students in such a position that their academic futures may be in jeopardy. The last time the boards went to negotiate, the government ignored their previous two methods of collective bargaining and instead attempted to negotiate a memorandum of understanding with the unions. Unions were quite upset about Bill 115. They certainly expressed their displeasure with how the government handled the negotiation and inserted themselves into the process.

So we do not want a repeat of what happened back in 2012 under Dalton McGuinty, undermining the trust of teachers across Ontario. We will look forward to continuing—

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: In response to some of the comments that were made around Bill 122, I think we all acknowledge that clarity is needed around collective bargaining going forward. There was a breach of trust with regard to Bill 115, that the PCs also participated in.

For the Liberal government to bring forward this piece of legislation with this particular timing indicates that they understand that there's a lack of trust in the education sector—unions, non-unionized, whatever. But they are also putting forward a piece of legislation that ties their hands to some degree.

There is one component that the member has not addressed that is contained within the legislation. There is a provision in 122 as it stands right now 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. For us, this leaves a little bit too much room and leniency for the minister. We have some trust issues with regard to the minister going forward. This is exactly what happened with 115 in September 2012: The minister didn't like the way things were going, even though zero and zero was on the table. For political reasons, they pushed and pushed and imposed a contract on the education sector, really negating both rounds of bargaining in the previous sessions and rewriting the negotiations process on a day-by-day basis. We have some serious concerns around this. We will be addressing the leniency as it relates to 122 when it gets to committee, because we think this leaves an open door to a piece of legislation, and quite honestly, that's unacceptable.

If we all care about students in the province of Ontario, peace and stability and an open, transparent process are needed.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's always a delight to hear my colleague from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Just to provide a little technical clarification, I guess, at 6.5 hours we can adjourn the debate. It is adjourning the debate for the afternoon; it doesn't enable us to call a vote. When the official opposition moved the adjournment of the debate yesterday and did so, we voted for it because we wanted to stay here and not go home early. In other words, there's no mechanism to end the debate unilaterally. Of course, we've had 12 hours of debate, 52 members, and it will continue.

Madam Speaker, I happen to be the husband of a principal. And by the way, Karan and I had our 19th wedding anniversary yesterday. She was very busy, as a principal at St. Patrick school in Peterborough. When you visit St. Patrick school—it's a great, great school. She has a combination of young, wonderful teachers and veteran teachers, because that's the kind of cohesive team—like the Montreal Canadiens—to move forward. You need to have that kind of team spirit.

Just last Friday, I was at the official opening of the new addition to St. Paul elementary school in beautiful Norwood, Ontario. The diocese bishop, Bishop De Angelis, was there; my federal colleague was there. What a great celebration, to see what's happening in the education system in the province of Ontario: bright-eyed students getting the best learning in the world and getting to where they'll take their jobs on in the future and be a great success story. All sides of the House here should be celebrating the success of education in the province of Ontario. Last Friday, I got to see it first-hand—a wonderful experience.

Collectively, we'll get this bill moved forward. It'll provide the framework for future negotiations. Let's get it moving forward.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened attentively to the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. She brought, I think, some very salient points to the discussion, and representing her riding as well as she does, I think she really should have mentioned more frequently the relationship between education and the economy.

We know that it's a knowledge-based economy. We know that skills and all those things that are occurring—to remind our children how important the educational system is. But this bill does absolutely nothing. This bill, in my view, is a “kiss and make up” for the mess they've made out of the system.

Now, it's not all their fault. This has always been a very sort of fraught-with-conflict system. I can recall that when the NDP were in power, they commissioned the Royal Commission on Learning report called *For the Love of Learning*. I think there were about 135 recommendations from that, many of which had been followed through by the Mike Harris government. In fact, it extended funding to the Catholic boards—equal funding for every student. In fact, he changed the student-focused funding model totally. In fact, who did we put in charge of that? It was their Minister of Education, Dave Cooke.

Now, what they have done here is completely dissolve any legitimacy and authority for the boards. In fact, they're going straight to the union that basically runs it. They're a professional union but, nonetheless, they've got to realize that the economy is related to how many resources are going to be at their disposal. I think that's the unwillingness that I sense. They beat the NDP in that, even though they had the royal commission. They also had more commissions. They were the government that brought in the Sweeney commission, which reduced and cut in half the number of school boards.

This board is now going to go in creating “educational LHINs”—that's what I call them. They're going to be called educational LHINs. There will be four or five panels. Where's the role of the parents and the students in this?

This bill does nothing about improving education; it's about improving relations.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I want to build on the points laid out by my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo, that not only did the Liberal government breach trust, which causes us to be in a position to have some apprehension about the ministerial discretion which is included in this bill and which gives the minister too broad of a scope—of a power and of a mandate to act his or her whim, to substitute a bargaining unit in terms of the negotiating.

The other problem with this bill that raises some concern is the fact that, while I'm supportive of the idea of formalizing the process and making sure that all the parties involved are recognized as individuals that are a part of this process, the crown or the province, while a formal participant, isn't actually defined as a formal party. The problem with that is that the crown or the province, therefore, is not actually bound by the Ontario Labour

Relations Act and doesn't have that requirement to bargain in good faith.

Now, one of the fundamental aspects of having a strong education system is peace and stability. If we're serious about ensuring that our children have a bright future, we need to make sure that our schools are stable, they're peaceful, and that we respect all the players involved. Without that respect, we can't move forward with a stable school system.

The fact that the crown or the province isn't actually bound by the OLRA to bargain in good faith raises some serious concerns when we already have a situation which is tenuous, and in which we've already seen a breach of trust. Moving forward, we need to eradicate any potential for abuse, and this is one other hole that we need to address. We need to make sure it doesn't exist so that we can really move forward with securing a bright future for the students in our society.

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

0940

Ms. Laurie Scott: I appreciate the comments from my colleagues in the third party, Kitchener–Waterloo and Bramalea–Gore–Malton, in respect to the trust and the debacle that occurred in 2012. I don't think that what went on in 2012 did anything for the relationships with the teachers, the students, the parents and, of course, the unions, who were kind of the big club in the whole situation.

The problem with this bill is rightly pointed out by my colleague from Durham. It's a "kiss and make up" bill. I agree; I like that line: It is a "kiss and make up" bill.

They missed the fact about jobs. I spoke a lot about the fact of our math scores going down and how the young teachers who have the high skills are not being hired because of seniority rules that exist. I talked about the amendment that my colleague from Cambridge has brought in for 274, to have that changed—because we are not preparing our children for the future and for the jobs.

The member from Peterborough: We have an area in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Peterborough that has higher-than-average unemployment and huge youth unemployment. I say in good conscience that this bill, for what it is—it's a process bill; it's tweaking a few things—is not really addressing what we on the Progressive Conservative side have been calling for, and that's a real jobs plan out there for our young people. We, as politicians, have to be responsible in setting the stage to create an environment for jobs that helps our young people move forward. I don't think this government really does put children as the focal point of educational discussions in this Legislature. I think they are too busy keeping their union friends happy and at bay, and that is wrong.

Madam Speaker, we're going to support 122; we're going to talk about it a little bit more, though.

I want to just say, happy—

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

Mr. Todd Smith: It's a pleasure to join the debate this morning on Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act.

I had an opportunity last week to visit a couple of high schools in my area, as well. They launched the ACT Foundation program at Centennial Secondary School in Belleville on Friday morning. I had the chance to work with some students on CPR and to make sure that they knew how to work those wonderful defibrillator machines that are now located in all of the high schools, thanks to some injection of cash from the private sector and, of course, our Ontario Trillium Foundation, which is a big supporter of that program as well.

I was at Quinte Secondary School later in the day, talking to Mr. Tetlock's grade 10 civics class about what life is like here at Queen's Park and what a joy it is to represent Prince Edwards–Hastings every day in this Legislature.

On Saturday afternoon, I was over at Mary Ann Sills Park, the beautiful turf park in Belleville, where the Moira senior Trojans—and I brought this up last week during debate—won back-to-back National Capital Bowl championships, with a 26-8 win—with all apologies to my friend from Leeds–Grenville—over the Gananoque Trojans. We knew the Trojans were going to win, going into that game. The Moira Trojans were playing the Gananoque Trojans, but it was Moira that came out on top.

Back to the bill, after that brief update on life at schools in the Quinte region: I can tell you that my wife is a very proud Moira Trojans supporter, because she's a high school teacher at Moira. That's the high school in east-end Belleville that just won its second straight National Capital Bowl championship on Saturday. She's a very good teacher. She worked right through the system. She was the head of the special education department at Moira Secondary School, and then she was the head of guidance for a year. Now she's the current head of the co-op program at Moira Secondary School. There are a lot of great teachers out there, and I know a lot of them give a lot of their time to coach football and run the student council and make sure the yearbook is out every year. There are great teachers teaching music lessons during lunch hours. There are so many out there. This bill that we're debating here does absolutely nothing to make the school experience any better for our students as they go to school.

We've talked about it before, Madam Speaker: In the last 10 years that this government has been in power, we're spending \$8.5 billion more in education for 225,000 fewer students who are in the system. The bulk of the money that they're injecting into the schools isn't to build better schools; the bulk of it isn't to make sure that these sports programs are available or the after-school programs are available. The money that they're injecting into the system is going into the pockets of the union membership. That's just a simple fact. It's not going to buy new textbooks; it's not going to buy new school supplies; it's not going to buy the latest and

greatest technology to put into schools; it's going into salaries.

Why wouldn't it, really? After all, Madam Speaker, when these guys needed to get into power in 2003, they went to the teachers' unions and they said, "Look, help us and we'll help you." That's what happened in the election in 2007 and the election in 2011 as well. But something happened last year, a cataclysmic event in the world of the Liberal Party of Ontario and the teachers' unions. They would like us to forget about that fact because, as our member from Durham just indicated, this is the "kiss and make up" bill. This government brought in Bill 115. That was their bill, and they turned their backs on their friends. I'm telling you, they're trying to kiss and make up right now, but the teachers who I talk to remember exactly whose bill that was. That belonged to the government across the way. They would like everybody to forget that that happened, but they're not forgetting, and with good reason.

You know, the NDP made much ado in October about Bill 74. They called that political favour-trading. But there's no greater example of political favour-trading than what we've seen over the last 10 years between the teachers' unions and the Liberal Party of Ontario. The single largest third-party spender in the last election wasn't EllisDon, not even close. It wasn't a major retailer or a developer or a brewery. Do you know who the biggest third-party spender was in the last election campaign?

Interjection: Who was it?

Mr. Todd Smith: It was the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. Most of that money went to members on that side of the House and to that party. And what did they do? They stabbed them in the back for political purposes—we're not exactly sure—or maybe, finally, a light bulb went off with Premier McGuinty and the finance minister, Dwight Duncan at the time, and they realized that they actually were digging a humongous hole that this province wasn't going to be able to get out of unless they started to get some of their costs under control. So they brought in Bill 115, and that was the first glimmer of recognition that the government had any inclination at all that they were spending far too much: "We can't afford it any longer. We have to start to get our costs under control in the province." They poured millions of dollars into making sure that their old buddies across the way got re-elected and then, at the first opportunity last September, they brought in Bill 115.

We've been saying for quite some time now that the government needs to bring in some bills that are going to start to invigorate our economy, bring some confidence back into the economy in Ontario. What we've seen over the last four weeks is hundreds and thousands of jobs leaving the province on a weekly basis. The Leamington closure of the Heinz facility after 104 years in operation—and my good friend here from the Leamington area knows exactly the impact that that kind of a closure is having on his community. I hate to say tumbleweeds will be blowing through Leamington, but that's the kind of effect this can have. The government was way too late

in helping them out, and it's the policies of this government that are largely responsible for Heinz closing that facility after 104 years. The red tape that exists in Ontario—and they keep bringing in bills that are increasing red tape even further, like Bill 91, which is going to have a very detrimental effect on food producers and beverage producers in the province of Ontario. I've met with many of them, and they're considering moving out of the province because it's just too inefficient to do business here in Ontario. But let's move on.

Sensing that there's a possible election in the wind, this government has done the following: It has taken money from the taxpayers and it has given it to ETFO to make up for a mix-up that that union made during the last round of negotiations. Now it's establishing a new negotiating regime. We don't know what the effect of this new regime will be just yet. We know that it could lead to as much acrimony as the last one, and certainly the unions seem to be preparing for that. It does nothing to address the quality of our education in our classrooms. It does nothing to ensure an increase in the four-year graduation rate—and I stress the four-year graduation rate because it's important to state how many kids are graduating on time, not just eventually. The one thing that we hear all the time from university professors is that 19-year-old young men who are in university are now behaving more like 17-year-old men because they are not ready when they leave high school. They're not ready for university. We hear that all the time from our university professors. This bill is not dealing with that problem, Madam Speaker.

0950

It's not dealing with the problem that we've heard from Dr. Rick Miner, who is the former president of Seneca College. I've had meetings with Rick Miner where he has the great presentation called People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People. We're not preparing students in the classroom in high school to fill the holes that we're going to have in our employment sector. We need to do a better job of making sure that our high school curriculums are in line with the jobs that are going to be available in Ontario, if there are any jobs left at the end of the day in Ontario.

They're not dealing with one of the biggest complaints that I hear at my constituency office in Belleville and in Picton and up in Bancroft, Madam Speaker, and that is the issue of retired teachers taking jobs on the occasional teaching roll, or the supply list, as it's called, from new graduates from university who are just looking for a foot in the door. I know teachers in my riding, or at least graduates from teachers' college in my riding, who are working bagging groceries at the Metro grocery store, or they're working at the Starbucks, or they're working at Tim Hortons, because they can't get their foot in the door even on the supply list because it's jam-packed full of teachers who have supposedly retired and moved on in their lives. They have a great pension plan; we know that. I look forward to my wife cashing in on her pension plan some day, which she's paying into. But they need to step

out of the way, because one of the biggest issues that I hear from young university graduates is that they can't even get on this list. This bill does nothing to deal with that situation.

There is so much more that this bill could have contained, but at the end of the day, it's exactly what the member from Durham called it. It's the "kiss and make up" bill. And you know what? The teachers who I talk to aren't going to fall for that this time.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's interesting to hear the member from Prince Edward–Hastings say that Bill 122 will have no impact whatsoever on public education, because, fundamentally, I suspect that this is the party that's not interested in being respectful or transparent or accountable to the people who are the front-line workers in the public education system. They made that very clear when they joined the Liberal government with Bill 115.

It's interesting that they call it the "kiss and make up" bill, and perhaps there's some truth to that. There are some trust issues; they're trying to mend some fences. It's an uncomfortable place to be, on that fence. But the PCs are not even interested in forming those positive relationships. For them to say that negotiations don't matter when part of that negotiations process, if those school boards are actually at the table—if school boards that are on the front line, that know their communities best, have a valid place at that table, they can bring those issues of the skilled trades to the negotiations and they can talk about the high needs on special education, because those are huge issues in school boards. School boards are dealing with a whole myriad of issues that don't have anything to do with the neo-liberal centralized agenda that has been imposed on them for the last 10 years.

I know it makes the Liberals uncomfortable when I talk about this, but you can actually see local democracy being undermined with every year that this government has held power. The voices of those trustees who are truly accountable at those school board tables have been ignored for way too long, and they're not going to be ignored anymore. If we get Bill 122 fixed at committee, if we plug those holes that clearly leave a lack of accountability, then it will be a good piece of legislation, and we look forward to making that happen.

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

Hon. John Milloy: We've had 12 hours of debate. It's time to send this bill to committee.

There have been some mischievous comments made about this. For the record, I just want to say that the only way, particularly in a minority Parliament, this can go to committee is if the Conservatives stop their filibustering and stop the debate. We have no power to end this debate, except listening. All of them make the speeches over and over again. It's an important bill. Let's send it to committee.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I look forward to the opportunity to chat for two minutes about the comments made by our various members.

I was reading the Toronto Star this morning—yes, I do actually read the Toronto Star—and I was quite pleased, actually, to see that they finally understand the grim reality that we are in, in the city of Toronto.

The headline is "Economic Report Paints Grim Picture of Ontario," and it was written by the very talented Martin Regg Cohn. It talks about Roger Martin's Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress, and sadly, what we realize is there is no progress. In fact, he calls it a "regress" here. Ontario is "in a stall," not only in our outputs, our exports, but also in our imports. The fact that there is no economic progress in an economic progress report is quite startling. When you see the take-away message that is here, it is: "No point worrying about Ontario's economic stall. Better to be afraid, very afraid." Those are the words of the Toronto Star. We're beyond the point of worrying about what's happening to Ontario; it's now the time to be frightened about what's happening.

We see, according to the Bank of Canada, that our revenue is going to be going down in the next year and the following year, and now that the Liberals have announced their spending spree, a pre-election spending spree, we see the spending going up. Revenue down, spending going up: There is absolutely no opportunity for them to balance the budget. That's the message we need to be sending to the voters.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I just want to talk briefly. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings talked about cashing in on his wife's pension somewhere down the road. Now, this is a party who is against public sector workers and who is against public sector pensions.

Now they're against teachers coming back to work after they retire. But just a couple of months ago, I heard the Tories standing here in the House saying, "We need to increase the retirement age for teachers." You can't have it all ways. You can't say, "Well, I want the teachers to work until they're 60—"

Mr. John Yakabuski: We'll raise the retirement age so they won't have to come back.

Ms. Cindy Forster: "I don't want them to have a public sector pension. I want jobs for young teachers."

Well, you won't have jobs for young teachers if you increase the retirement age from 55 to 60 for teachers. The young teachers will be 30 by the time they actually get into the workforce.

You know what? As far as having teachers work after they retire, with their good pensions that they actually get, they're going to still be able to drive the economy, because they're going to have some money to spend, and that's what drives the economy in our communities.

With respect to the Liberals saying that we've had enough debate on this issue, we agree; we'd like to get this on to committee. But on the other hand, you voted

yesterday to continue the debate, and you voted against the adjournment. We could have adjourned yesterday and had 10 or 15 minutes less of debate on this issue.

I think that's all I really want to say on this issue at the moment.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Todd Smith: I appreciate the comments from my NDP colleagues from Kitchener–Waterloo and Welland. They're a little grumpy this morning. You can understand why, after the results in the federal election last night, they'd all be a little down and out. It was not a good night for their federal NDP cousins, that's for sure.

I'd like to thank the government House leader as well for his comments—and the fact that he's heckling as well, which is also nice—and my colleague from Nipissing, who enlightened us again.

It's nice to know that the Toronto Star is finally catching on that we are not doing well when it comes to the financial ledger here in Ontario. It's because of back-to-back-to-back-to-back multi-billion dollar deficits that this government continues to run, and this is a big part of it—and this bill is actually a big part of it, Bill 122, because, as we've dubbed it, the “kiss and make up” bill, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, comes on the heels of Bill 115, which occurred last summer, and that was a bill that was put forward by the government.

This is just a process bill, as we've heard a number of times here today. It's a way for the government to try and establish a negotiating framework. It's something that probably could have been done behind the scenes, but they brought it out here because they don't have a plan to get our economy on a roll so that we can create jobs.

1000

If I was more of a cynical man—and I know, like the Minister of the Environment, I'm not really a cynical man—I'd say that this was drafted because the government needed a little leverage over one of its biggest fundraisers because those fundraisers are starting to play footsie with the NDP as a result of Bill 115 last summer. That's why we have Bill 122. Let's call a spade a spade. Bill 122 is on the table because they were worried about losing one of their biggest supporters financially to the NDP. It does absolutely nothing to make our education system better. It does nothing to improve the experience for our pages and my two daughters so that they can get a job at the end of the day here in Ontario.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm pleased to rise for the first time and speak to Bill 122 on behalf of the constituents I represent in Kitchener–Conestoga. I was actually just scanning a letter that my colleague the new critic for education, Rob Leone, sent to the minister, I believe just last week. He goes on to say that, since has been critic, the government has tabled two bills that really don't address the true issues that need to be addressed in our

education system. I think that's unfortunate. However, we will carry on with regard to Bill 122.

During the Bill 115 process, the government ignored their previous two methods for collective bargaining and instead attempted to negotiate MOUs with the unions. The unions obviously were very upset that the government inserted itself in the negotiations, which resulted in labour unrest in the form of strikes and the suspension of extracurricular activities for the remainder of the school year.

In fact, I recall meeting with our chair of the local school board, Linda Fabi, who has now gone on to retirement and to bigger and better things. We wish her well in her later years, I suppose, enjoying herself. But I cannot forget the students that I spoke with during the course of that time last year. The calls started pouring into my constituency office, from not only students but their parents, who just couldn't believe that the unions had ordered their members to stop offering extracurricular activities. Actually, last Friday I watched CTV News, and it showed those teachers who were publicly shamed in one of the publications for going against their union and basically siding with the students. I recall a basketball team that had paid up, in the region of Waterloo, to go to Phoenix in Arizona to play over the Christmas holidays. There was a lot of debate on whether that team would go, forfeiting a lot of the fees and money that those parents had invested in their students. I know that the students by far wanted to get to Phoenix to play in that game. Those two teachers, thankfully, did say that they would support the team and they would go, and we thank them for that. In fact, I did place a call to both of them thanking them, on behalf of the parents and students in my communities for doing what's right, and that's to provide those extracurriculars to those deserving students.

The students, though, just couldn't understand how the unions could order their members to use extracurricular activities as a bargaining chip in a labour dispute without considering the effect that this action would have on the future development of our young people throughout Ontario. In fact, a lot of those students talked about it not just being sports or recreational extracurricular activities; I remember running into a student attending Huron Heights in my riding of Kitchener who said that she attended early-morning prep and after-school prep to bump her marks up to be able to get into college or university the following year. Again, it's not just the recreational or extracurricular activities that were important; it was the prep before and after school that would allow her to get a good post-secondary education and eventually a good job down the road.

However, though, facing the full power of the unions—I have to commend two students, Erica Boer and Taylor Cloutier, both students at Huron Heights, also in Kitchener. They did everything they could to bring back those extracurricular activities. Erica started by sending me a letter outlining her concerns and disappointments with the teachers' job action. She wrote that “extracurricular

activities open doors to college and university and without these activities many kids will lose opportunities for their futures.” I totally agree with her. She continued, saying, “We are the future of this province and deserve to have a voice. I personally don’t want to stand by and lose the things I love to do. It only takes one person to make a difference.” I have to say, I was immensely moved by Erica’s letter. She demonstrated leadership and understanding of the political situation and knew the importance of restoring extracurriculars for not only herself, but her classmates and the rest of the students across the province. In fact, I had the opportunity to meet Erica and Taylor to talk about their letter, the effects that the union’s job action was having on their high school experience—because down the road at the Catholic school, they weren’t going through that difficulty. We talked about Erica, who had just started volleyball. Already, in that limited time, she had developed some strong friendships with her teammates, but in one fell swoop, the unions took that away from Erica, without a moment’s notice.

Instead of giving up, though, Erica and Taylor organized their classmates. They had more than 350 students sign a petition calling on the government to restore their extracurricular activities. To assist their efforts, I also sent a letter along with this petition to the Minister of Education. Unfortunately, it didn’t get a proper response from the government, but they did manage to raise enough awareness about the issue to make major media in the region, the Waterloo Record, pick up the story. So although it wasn’t Erica’s responsibility, she continued to be an advocate for students across Ontario, dedicating countless hours to restore those activities.

Madam Speaker, it’s time to implement real measures that will ensure that students like Erica and Taylor will never have to endure disruptions like this again. Unfortunately, though, Bill 122 specifically doesn’t address some of the major problems in our education system, as we have seen with Bill 115. In fact, it doesn’t make a plan that will improve test scores and the quality of education to our students, as I outlined in my colleague Rob Leone’s letter just recently. It doesn’t help build confidence with parents in our education system. It doesn’t define the role of a teacher and which duties they are responsible for, even in times of labour unrest—we have to put an end to using extracurricular activities as a bargaining chip—nor does it encourage teachers to be more involved in their schools in the form of extracurricular activities and after-school programs. It doesn’t make these types of activities voluntary so that they won’t be barred by teachers’ unions.

My good friend the member from Cambridge wrote to the Minister of Education last week and in his letter addressed seniority rules for teachers as being a major problem in our education system. Young, enthusiastic teachers and new college graduates often go without teaching simply because of the seniority rules that are in place. This is despite the fact that they are highly qualified, dedicated and have enough experience to provide a good-quality education to our students here in Ontario.

However, Bill 122 does define central and local bargaining. One section, in fact, talks about the role the teachers’ federations have at the central negotiating table with corresponding trustee associations. It also includes the role of government in the central bargaining process. Secondly, there is a local bargaining component that will still be maintained between the school board and their federation locals. It’s important that this kind of local bargaining remains in place, and obviously, Bill 122 formally institutionalizes that.

However, during the whole Bill 115 debacle, I also heard from many support workers who didn’t have a voice during the strike. They were left to obey authorities without any input. Speaker, we must ensure that when we are formally institutionalizing a bargaining process, all the seats at the table are properly filled, of course, with those stakeholders. This is another concern I have with Bill 122.

As a member of the official opposition, I’ve seen the government create legislation that gives, obviously, great power to the ministries without much review or scrutiny afterwards, an important part of the legislative process. The same goes for Bill 122, which is why we are calling for there to be a sunset clause added within it. When my colleague the member from Cambridge consulted teachers, school boards and trustees about this bill, they were fairly pleased at first glance but had a concern over the power the ministry had. Including a sunset clause would give the opportunity for the partners of education to come before a legislative committee, to consult with the ministry officials about the sections that work in the bill and what should be modified, based on the bargaining process at the time. I think that we can all agree this should be implemented within Bill 122 to protect the bargaining process in the future.

Finally, I want to reiterate the negotiation the PC Party is asking for, which was sent to the minister herself in a letter dated November 21. It asked them to commit to modifying regulation 274 so that we can have merit-based hiring back in our schools, so that students are receiving the best-quality education and that the principal is the one who determines who will fill that job best for his or her own school. Hiring practices must be based on who is the best person to fill the job, to improve test scores and engage our youth in extracurricular activities. At a time when math scores are down, we must make sure we are hiring the best people to bring our young Ontarians back on track and get them job-ready, shall I say? It should not be based on seniority, leaving our young graduates jobless or working at the same place they did before completing higher education. As many of the members on this side of the House have said, if the government is willing to meet that request, then we will meet them with theirs and move this bill to committee as fast as possible. However, if they will not make this compromise, then we will continue to have these discussions and speak on behalf of our communities and our constituencies.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): It being close to 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30.
The House recessed from 1011 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Gravelle: We're very pleased to welcome a delegation from the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association and the Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce. They're here for their lobby day, and we're glad to have them here. There's a reception, may I say, right after question period, in room 228, and we invite all the members to join us.

Let me do the introductions quickly—I've got a good list here. We've got Dave Canfield, who is the president of NOMA and, of course, the mayor of Kenora. We've got Phil Vinet, the hard-working mayor of Red Lake; Mayor Keith Hobbs, the city of Thunder Bay. We've got Councillor Iain Angus, from the city of Thunder Bay; Councillor Larry Hebert, from the city of Thunder Bay; Gary Gamsby, reeve of the township of Morley; Roy Hoffman, mayor of the town of Pickle Lake; Rebecca Johnson, a councillor from the city of Thunder Bay, representing NOACC; Andy Scribilo, the president of the Kenora Chamber of Commerce, with NOACC; George Macey, from the Marathon Chamber of Commerce, with NOACC; and Kristen Oliver, the hard-working executive director of NOMA.

We welcome you all. We'll look forward to seeing you at the reception and the lunch today.

M. Grant Crack: J'aimerais souhaiter la bienvenue à Jean-Marc Lalonde et aussi à mon ami Rheal Filion de Rockland, à Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Todd Smith: We could have used Jean-Marc's coaching skills last night, as the Ontario Legiskaters fell 7-3 to the Ontario Midwives.

However, I would like to introduce some guests. Melissa Bhagat is the newest employee with the official opposition. She's in the west members' gallery, and she's joined by Mitch "Ron Burgundy" Heimpel as well this morning.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome Marc Xuereb, who is the president of the Waterloo Regional Labour Council, to Queen's Park today.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It's a great pleasure of mine to welcome Mr. George Weber, who is the president and CEO of the Royal Ottawa Hospital, which is located in the great riding of Ottawa Centre. George, welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's my privilege to welcome the grade 5 class from Cathy Wever Elementary Public School in my riding. They haven't arrived yet—I guess they had some problems on the highway—but they will be here shortly.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to welcome the Ontario Pork association—I don't know if they're here yet—Amy Cronin, the chair, and Ken Ovington, execu-

tive director, who are in our gallery. The Ontario Pork reception tonight is in room 228 at 4:30, and everyone's welcome.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is a pleasure—actually, my colleague from Ottawa Centre already introduced Mr. George Weber.

I'd also like to recognize Jean-Marc Lalonde too, as the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell has. I would like him to come back and coach this hockey team that we have here. The Legiskaters lost very badly last night and last week, and I'd really like Jean-Marc to come back and coach them.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted to introduce Karim Mamdani, the president and CEO of Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences; Dr. Catherine Zahn, president and CEO of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; George Weber, who I know has been introduced, president and CEO of the Royal Ottawa; and Carol Lambie, president and CEO of Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care. Welcome, all.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Hugh Moran from the Ontario Petroleum Institute, representing Ontario's 1,200 producers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On behalf of the member from Etobicoke Centre, to visit with page Niam Vora: mother, Arpana Vora; father, Adesh Vora; sisters, Sera, Naiya and Aahna; grandfather Nitin Amin; grandmother Pramila Amin; aunt Priya Amin; aunt Leena Amin; and aunt Monica Vora. Welcome to Queen's Park, on behalf of the member from Etobicoke Centre.

It is the tradition of the Speaker to introduce someone who's been introduced twice, and once to come back as a coach: Jean-Marc Lalonde from Prescott and Russell in the 36th Parliament and Glengarry–Prescott–Russell in the 37th, 38th and 39th Parliaments. Bonjour, monsieur Lalonde.

I'm also told that he's working feverishly on getting a hockey game with the Legiskaters and Quebec, as well.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry; I got that wrong. It's with Quebec's midwives.

Laughter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MANUFACTURING JOBS

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, when I grew up in the north end of Fort Erie, most of my friends' parents—their moms or dads usually worked at the factory, they worked at the plant. Manufacturing helped to build our middle class; it's the backbone of communities like those that I grew up in.

There is a long, sorry list of manufacturing that has left our province. Navistar has left Chatham to go to Indiana. Xstrata has left Timmins to go to Quebec. John Deere left our area in Niagara for Wisconsin. Siemens

left Hamilton to go to Charlotte, North Carolina. Caterpillar left London to go to Indiana—I could spend my entire time, sadly, reciting this list.

Premier, there have been 300,000 manufacturing job losses in our province. These products are still being made. They're being made in North America, but they're being made everywhere but the province of Ontario. Why is that happening, and where is your plan to actually bring those jobs back to our great province of Ontario?

Interjections.

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

Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Leader of the Opposition will want to hear the list of businesses that have come to Ontario and jobs that have been created in Ontario, but before I go through that, I want to acknowledge that there has been a shift in manufacturing in Ontario. There is no doubt about that.

The fact that we decided as a government to support the auto industry, the fact that we have put in place regional development funds to work with businesses so that they can make the shift to advanced manufacturing—initiatives all of which the opposition voted against and did not support. We have recognized that there is a change—there's a change in the global economy, there's a change in Ontario's economy, and we believe that the best thing that we can do—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We believe that the best thing that we can do is to work with businesses to create an environment so that business will come here. We have over 400,000 net new jobs in Ontario since 2009. We need to—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm moving right to identifying ridings.

Supplementary, please.

Mr. Tim Hudak: Premier, the problem is that Ontario used to be at the top of the list for investment and job creation. Under an Ontario PC government, we'll be at the top of the list again.

I don't think that the Liberal government understands the importance of manufacturing and resource development to our economy. You can do all the research and development in the world, but unless you make something at the end of the day, it's about as useful as a two-legged stool.

We have a plan to bring in 300,000 advanced manufacturing jobs to strengthen the middle class, and not the Liberal jobs that are part-time, temp job to temp job, with no wages or benefit increases. We actually see good, strong middle-class jobs you can count on. We've got a plan to do so.

Last week, the hemorrhaging continued with the loss of jobs in Leamington, Ontario. There have been 38,000 job losses, under your leadership as Premier in manufacturing alone.

Premier, I'll ask you again: In the global economy, why are they growing manufacturing everywhere else but the province of Ontario?

1040

Interjections.

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

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to just assure the Leader of the Opposition that in my conversation on Friday with the community leaders and the business folks from the Leamington area—your member attended that meeting. It was a very important meeting.

Of course we are disappointed with the decision that Heinz made around the Leamington plant, but we will work with that community. I believe that there are many, many possibilities for that community.

But, Mr. Speaker, make no mistake. The Leader of the Opposition and his party would cut and slash across the board. They would fire civil servants. They would take workers out of education, out of health care, and they would engage in a race to the bottom in terms of working conditions and wages and benefits, because—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton, come to order. The member from Dufferin–Caledon, come to order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are not going to engage in that race to the bottom. It is not responsible. The gains that organized labour have made in this province over the previous decades will not be lost by this government.

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

Mr. Tim Hudak: If you had worked at Heinz, if you had worked at Caterpillar, if you had worked at Volvo in Goderich that went to Pennsylvania, Gracious Living opening their plant in New York, if you lost your job at Xstrata—Premier, we have hit rock bottom. The Liberals are winning the race to rock bottom.

My plan is to put Ontario back on top, to bring in 300,000 advanced manufacturing jobs—forestry, mining, manufacturing.

Here's the other thing: You blew the Cliffs deal. This chance—it could have been what the oils sands are to Alberta. You fumbled the ball. We lost those jobs. That investment will go elsewhere.

The very same day that Cliffs walked away from the table—they said high energy rates are part of that equation; Heinz, high energy rates—you spent your time hugging it up with Al Gore, the very policies that drove hydro rates through the roof in the first place. Don't you think, considering the impact of hydro on jobs, that was a

poke in the eye? Wasn't that salt in the wounds? Wasn't it an extraordinary misjudgment to embrace the high-energy policies that are driving jobs out of our province?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It is extremely important that the people of Ontario listen to what the Leader of the Opposition just said, because underlying what the Leader of the Opposition just said is this: He believes, by what he just said, that we cannot have clean air in Ontario, Mr. Speaker. He believes that we have to sacrifice the environment to—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I care deeply about people losing their jobs. I care deeply about bringing jobs to Ontario. I care deeply about working with businesses, but not to sacrifice our children's health. There is no place for policies in this province that would sacrifice children to the economy.

Interjections.

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

New question.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question this morning is to the Premier. Good morning, Premier.

I have repeatedly asked the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games for the real numbers on the Pan Am Games after painstakingly uncovering multiple budgets. Finally, last week, we got somewhere. The minister admitted to ballooning costs and upped the \$1.4-billion budget to \$2.56 billion, but we know the spending doesn't stop there.

What scares me is that the Liberals are cutting deals with their enablers over here to cancel an investigation into the minister's lacklustre management of the Pan Am Games.

Speaker, when will the Premier tell us exactly what she's hiding? Will she tell it to us now?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite has demonstrated that we have provided information; we've provided the information he has asked for. The government doesn't set salaries for the TO2015 employees. It's not an agency of the government, but we have absolutely provided the information that the member opposite has asked for.

What is really important is that we understand that the investments in the Pan Am Games are investments that are going to pay off over the long term. There will be

legacies of these games in terms of affordable housing, in terms of venues.

Of course, we have to be accountable for the expenditures, but it would be great if the party opposite had some enthusiasm about these fantastic games and legacy that are going to be in place.

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

Mr. Rod Jackson: Our kids are going to be paying for this. Premier, we're very excited about the games; we're just not excited about your mismanagement of them.

This government is saving themselves from scrutiny by cancelling the Pan Am investigation in the general government committee. Ironically, the very vocal third party Pan Am critic has sold out to make this possible. He traded Pan Am accountability for support for his union-friendly bill, which effectively cancelled this investigation.

As the government continues to point out, we are having the people's games, but, just so we all know, it's also the people's money.

Will the Premier stop hiding and commit today to continuing the Pan Am investigation into the accountability of the Pan Am secretariat? Yes or no?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the government House leader is going to want to speak to the discussions that are going on at the committee in the final supplementary, but what I want to say is that it is extremely important that the questions be asked, that we be accountable for the money that's being invested. To this point, the projects are all on time and under budget.

As the minister has said many times, it's often the capital projects that cause the problem in games like this. That is not the case. We are seeing a very good trajectory for those projects, and we expect that, as the other costs and the other investments are made, the same will hold true.

Forty-one countries and their athletes are going to be here in 2015. This is the biggest event we have held on Ontario soil. We are enthusiastic about it. We hope that the party opposite will get on board.

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

Mr. Rod Jackson: This government has not been accurate with the numbers since the beginning. They have not been forthcoming with any of the proper numbers for the Pan Am Games and have admitted that they're going to balloon in the coming years.

Clearly, the Liberals do not want the Pan Am Games investigated. Clearly, the NDP doesn't want it either. Their committee manoeuvring proves that they will go to any length to avoid accountability for their compulsive spending habits. This includes the manipulation of the vocal third party Pan Am critic, who has bought support for his union-loving bill in exchange for cancelling the Pan Am investigation.

We want successful games and respect for the hard-working families of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm very concerned about that last statement. I'd ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Withdrawn.

Premier, allow the investigation into the Pan Am management, or ask the minister to step down. You choose.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we are trying to make this Legislature work. The fact of the matter is, the estimates committee and the general government committee are both looking into the Pan Am Games. There were literally thousands of documents that were delivered to the estimates committee, the first tranche that went forward. We at general government are looking at a way that we can look at Pan Am and also look at some very important legislation: Bill 105, which will reduce taxes for businesses in this province. But the Progressive Conservative Party is playing games. They are filibustering in committee—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member from Simcoe–Grey will come to order. Thank you.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, it is a pattern. They are filibustering in committee so that taxes cannot be cut for small businesses.

1050

The other night, the bravery awards given out by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario were delayed by 20 minutes because of the bell-ringing antics of the opposition.

We are trying to make this work—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The leader of the third party.

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is to the Premier. Yesterday, I asked the Acting Premier if the Liberal government signed an initial agreement or term sheet with Cliffs Natural Resources. The Acting Premier wouldn't even tell us whether one existed.

Today I'll ask the Premier: Did the government have an agreement with Cliffs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the leader of the third party asked this question yesterday. I know that she knows that what she's referring to is commercially sensitive and some personal information. I know that she's aware of that. We're going to continue to work diligently to make sure that we're ready to support development in the Ring of Fire. That is our commitment. That is where our commitment has been all along. But I think that asking for information that is rightly confidential does not advance the cause of the relationship and the development of the Ring of Fire in any way.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We would love to see the cause be advanced in some way; the Liberals don't seem to be able to advance it at all.

In May 2012, the finance minister confirmed the government had reached an agreement with Cliffs regarding plans to process chromite in Capreol. Either the minister

was mistaken or this agreement exists. If it does, what commitments did the Liberals make in that term sheet?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reality is that there were discussions and there were terms of reference for those discussions. But there was a lot of commercially sensitive information that was part of that discussion, and that commercially sensitive information is not available.

We're going to continue to work to develop the Ring of Fire. We are setting up the development corporation, as the Minister of Northern Development and Mines has spoken about. We are not backing away from our commitment to develop this very rich deposit. I know that there are mayors from communities in the north who are here today and who are going to be meeting with various of us, who are very, very interested in that commitment because it has to do with infrastructure, it has to do with economic development and it has to do with the capacity of the north to create the jobs that we know are necessary. That's why we're not stepping away.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: A KWG Resources press release indicates that the term sheet the government signed with Cliffs included commitments to an "attractive" electricity rate, as well as commitments to build a road to move people, equipment and ore in and out of the Ring of Fire. We know that none of these things have happened. Did the government make those commitments?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, there were arrangements that were made. There was a discussion that happened with a business. We were very clear that we were pleased about that. It's unfortunate that, for their own business model and their own reasons, Cliffs has stepped away. But there are other companies who are interested in working with the government, and we look forward to working with them.

I also hope that the federal government will be a partner in the development of the Ring of Fire. This has been the situation all along: We need the federal government, which, in fact, has sung the praises of the Ring of Fire and talked about what a huge opportunity it is and how involved they are. In fact, they are not as involved as they need to be. We need them at the table with us as we work with First Nations, municipalities and commercial interests. We look forward to those partnerships allowing us to continue to work to develop the Ring of Fire.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Blaming Ottawa is this Liberal government's "the dog ate my homework" excuse, and we hear it far too often in this Legislature.

My next question is for the Premier. As a cabinet minister, the Premier herself went to Capreol and announced "thousands of jobs." Those were the government's words: "thousands of jobs." People want to know what happened to those jobs.

The government said they signed an agreement on behalf of the people of Ontario. Why won't the Premier

release the agreement with Cliffs so Ontarians can see whether the Liberals actually lived up to their end of that agreement?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand that the leader of the third party is disappointed. We are disappointed as well; that goes without saying. But the Ring of Fire is not about one company; it's not about one level of government. The leader of the third party can chastise me for calling on the federal government. I think it's eminently responsible of us to call on the federal government to work with us.

I'm not blaming the federal government, I say to the leader of the third party. What I'm saying is that if this extraordinary opportunity is going to be realized, we need all levels of government working together. We need to be working with First Nations, we need to be working with commercial interests because it is a massive development—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that kind of partnership. In fact, in their letter of November 20, 2013, the press release, Cliffs says that they will continue to work with the Ontario government, First Nations communities and other interested parties to explore potential solutions related to the critical issue of infrastructure. We look forward to continuing—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, as Liberal dithering and inaction has pushed Cliffs away from the Ring of Fire, people are beginning to ask about the challenges that other companies are facing in the Ring of Fire. How many other term sheets has the government signed? How many of these other companies are facing the same problems that pushed Cliffs away?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When I was Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, I can remember saying in this House and in other venues that the development of the Ring of Fire was a very complex issue, and it was going to require that we understand the many moving parts. One of those parts, Mr. Speaker, is the relationship with First Nations. I said very clearly to my colleagues—and they will attest to this—that if we did not move in a responsible and coordinated way, if we did not make sure that we had environmental issues dealt with and that we worked with First Nations, we would not be able to develop the Ring of Fire—

Interjection.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite from Renfrew talks about delays, but Mr. Speaker, the reality is, there are many complex issues that need to be dealt with in the development of the Ring of Fire. We are working on those, and we look forward to working with commercial interests, including Cliffs, as we go forward. We're going to develop the Ring of Fire, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday, the Minister of Finance told reporters that when it comes to the government's jobs plan, the net result is that it's working. For people in Capreol who received an empty promise of thousands of jobs or, frankly, the families in Leamington watching the cornerstone of their economy pack up and leave, the net result is that people aren't working.

I know the Premier likes to run, but she can't run away from the fact that these jobs are her responsibility. When will the government stop passing the buck, stop playing politics and admit that the status quo just isn't working when it comes to creating and protecting jobs in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I understand the rhetoric of the leader of the third party. In fact, it is the combined responsibility of the private sector and the public sector to work together. It is our responsibility as government to create the conditions so that the private sector can create jobs.

I'm just going to talk about some of the places where that is happening—because I understand. I'm concerned about what happened in Leamington, and I know that the leader of the third party knows I am. But I'm also pleased that in Ottawa at Ericsson Canada, there are new jobs: 35 new jobs, retaining 105. In Cambridge, Ontario, at Toyota, our investment of \$16.8 million created approximately 400 jobs; at GM in Ingersoll, over 2,500 jobs as a result of the \$250-million investment that the government made; Green Arc Tire Manufacturing in St. Marys, Ontario: 340 jobs.

There is a long list of job creation, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to foster those conditions for job creation.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is to the Premier.

Premier, I can't believe you're trying to blame the federal government for your failure in the Ring of Fire. I, like many of my colleagues, was dismayed at your comments over the weekend suggesting this. Yesterday in the House, your finance minister also tried to shift blame and refused to take any responsibility for the deal with Cliffs falling through.

1100

Premier, your government was quick to take credit when you made the deal with Cliffs. Your May 9, 2012, press release stated, "Thousands of jobs coming to northern Ontario." By taking credit for the Ring of Fire before delivering, you and your government deserve the lion's share of the blame for your failure. Premier, now that the dust has settled, who have you held accountable for the failure of your government on this issue?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'm not blaming the federal government. Let me be really clear about that: I'm not blaming the federal government. What I am saying, which is what we have said all along, is that there are many partners who are needed in order to be able to explore and exploit the resources and the possibility of the Ring of Fire. It is impossible for one

company or one order of government to do this. It's a huge project, and from the beginning we have said that we need the private sector, we need First Nations and we need the federal government and municipalities to work with us so that we can develop that resource. That is not inconsistent; in fact, it is consistent with what we have said from the beginning. And I will be calling on Prime Minister Harper, as I have already done, to work with us.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Have you called them?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Have I called him? Absolutely. I've written to him, and we're trying to set up a meeting. I look forward to that meeting, and I look forward to the opportunity to have a discussion with the Prime Minister about his role and about our combined partnership.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Norm Miller: Again to the Premier: With your 2012 press release, you would have sworn the mine was about to open. Premier, with all the bureaucracy that your government has set up around this project, it's no wonder you're having difficulty finding accountability. With overlapping ministries, the Ring of Fire Secretariat, panels and a negotiator that you appointed, there's a lot of talk and very little action. In your 2012 press release, five different ministers and you yourself were quoted.

Premier, had you taken the advice of our northern white paper, we wouldn't be in this place today. Why don't you do it now? Implement the PC plan and put a single minister in charge of the Ring of Fire.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We won't implement the outline that the opposition has laid out, Mr. Speaker, because it's simplistic. It does not recognize the complexity of the development opportunity. It doesn't recognize that there are, as I said, many moving parts. I have said from the beginning of this opportunity that we have to work with all players in order for us to be successful.

I travelled to Webequie when I was the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, and I met with the community there, and we talked about the training opportunities—training opportunities that are being made available right now. Those training opportunities are being set up, and there are young people at Webequie who are going to be able to be trained and will be ready to work in the Ring of Fire as we explore, as we develop that resource. That's the kind of process that's necessary. It takes time—I recognize that—and it will be successful.

CHILD POVERTY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. In a report released today, Campaign 2000 strongly condemns this government's 2012 decision to delay scheduled increases in the Ontario Child Benefit and to freeze the minimum wage. They blame these Liberal government decisions for the slow progress in reducing the child poverty in this province.

In 2008 the government made grand statements to reduce child poverty by 25% over five years, and in 2013 it is absolutely nowhere near achieving what is a very

modest goal. How does this government justify its lack of action in reducing child poverty by 25%?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Children and Youth Services, who has responsibility for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, will want to speak to the supplementary, but I want to just say to the member of the third party that she knows full well that it's our government that introduced a Poverty Reduction Strategy in this province. We are the first government to have a Poverty Reduction Strategy. We have an Ontario Child Benefit because we introduced it and we implemented it. In fact, the child poverty rate in Ontario fell by over 9% during the height of the recession.

I believe that the member of the third party is talking about doing more and doing it more quickly. I understand that that would be her request, and I thank Campaign 2000 for their report. But make no mistake: We are committed to poverty reduction, we continue to be committed to poverty reduction, and we will move on future actions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again to the Premier: The Campaign 2000 document cites a number of other devastating cuts to supports for low-income people made by this government. For example, the 2012 Ontario budget saw the cancellation of benefits for people on social assistance, including health benefits and, tragically, the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit. The government talked about reducing child poverty by 25% in 2008—but this report makes it crystal clear that part of the blame for its failure lies in policy decisions made by this very government.

How does the government finally explain those decisions to the hundreds of thousands of Ontario children who go to bed hungry every night?

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

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Thank you for the question.

I, too, would like to thank Campaign 2000 for the report that they've released today. I, in fact, have met with Campaign 2000 on a number of occasions, and I share their concern with respect to our children and the future of this province.

I'd like to reiterate that it was this government that brought in the Ontario children's benefit, which is paid out to 950,000 children. That has been directly related to the fall of 9.2% of our child poverty rate, and the report says that we were successful in that during the height of the greatest recession that we've had.

Ontario has the second-lowest low-income rate in the entire country, Speaker. We've lifted 47,000 children out of poverty, and we prevented 61,000 children from getting into poverty. We have done a lot of work with respect to minimum wage, with respect to social assistance reforms and with respect to our housing benefits.

Is there more work to do? Absolutely, and that's why we're creating a new poverty reduction strategy and why we're all working together to that end. I am absolutely committed to this.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Minister, last Thursday, the government announced it would be introducing the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act. This important piece of legislation, if passed, would ensure that Ontario never returns to the days of using dirty coal-fired plants to generate electricity for the province. This policy is one that I have had strong support for from the people of Ottawa–Orléans for the last 10 years. The closure of the last coal plants in the province is, in my opinion, as an engineer and as a former business owner, a momentous achievement that will help protect the health and environment of Ontarians for generations to come. We must think of our children and our grandchildren. It is a significant landmark in the global fight against climate change.

Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Energy please inform the House about the importance of the bill that will be introduced by the Minister of the Environment later today?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for his support.

Last week, I had the pleasure of standing with the Premier, the Minister of the Environment, the Minister of Health, our host, Environmental Defence, and a special guest, former Vice-President Al Gore, to announce our vision of a coal-free future for Ontario.

With Nanticoke generating station slated to close at the end of this year and the Thunder Bay generating station set for conversion to advanced biomass, Ontario will have a coal-free electricity system.

To ensure that we never go back to the days of burning dirty coal, our government introduced a bill that, if passed, will make it illegal for the province to burn coal for power.

Mr. Speaker, our government is a global leader on this issue. We are the first jurisdiction in North America to accomplish this goal, and it's a cause for celebration for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister. Now that we've reached this significant milestone, it is important to ensure that we don't go backwards. Climate change is an issue that is not going to disappear, and Ontario needs to remain a global leader going forward, because if nobody takes action, it will be impossible to avoid its catastrophic consequences.

As Tim Gray, executive director of Environmental Defence, said, "Ontario has shown the world that bold action on climate change can be done. Ontarians should feel proud to live in the first jurisdiction in North America that is kicking the coal habit, a place that today took immediate meaningful action on climate change."

Mr. Speaker, getting off coal is not only a major triumph in the fight against climate change, but will also provide significant health benefits to the people of Ontario. Can the minister please tell us about the health and environmental benefits of eliminating dirty coal-fired generation in the province?

1110

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Getting off coal is the single largest climate change initiative in North America. It will save \$4.4 billion in avoided environmental and health care costs. It's going to mean a better quality of life for people with asthma, and less children and seniors suffering from air-quality-related illness. It will mean fewer smog days and lower carbon emissions, equivalent to taking seven million cars off the road.

Finally, I would like to quote Mr. Gore when he was here last week. He said that future generations will ask, "How did you find the moral courage to act" against climate change? And part of the answer will be: "Ontario, Canada, led the way."

CHRIS MAZZA

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Health. Dr. Chris Mazza is under criminal investigation for his role in the Ornge air ambulance scandal. He is under investigation by the College of Physicians and Surgeons for his unethical conduct as a physician. He pleaded mental incapacity when called to testify at the public accounts committee and had to be brought here under a special Speaker's warrant. Front-line staff and patients were put at risk as a direct result of his gross mismanagement and fraudulent schemes and self-aggrandizement.

Now we learn that he's back on the Ministry of Health payroll, working in the emergency ward at the Thunder Bay regional health centre.

Speaker, how can the minister justify this offensive disrespect for the front-line staff at Ornge, for the patients whose lives were put at risk and for the taxpayers of this province who were ripped off for millions as a result of this—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite knows full well that hiring decisions are made by hospitals. They are made independently. Hospitals have the responsibility for the doctors that they hire. To suggest that I run the human resources departments in hospitals across this province is kind of ridiculous.

I will say, Speaker, that in order for a doctor to be hired, they must be certified by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I'll look forward to the supplementary, where I can speak more to this.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, based on that response, I call into question the competency of whoever was doing the hiring at that hospital and I call into question the competency of this minister who allows it to happen. Once again, she is pleading ignorance and that she has no authority. We've heard that throughout this entire file: She can do nothing; she has no authority.

Apart from the obvious irreparable damage that was done to our emergency ambulance service and the harm that was done to the men and women who were forced to

work under this man's tyranny, he travelled the world in the lap of luxury at taxpayers' expense. He saddled taxpayers with multi-millions of dollars of debt, thanks to his mismanagement. He should not be in an emergency ward; he should be in a jail.

This minister stands by and tells us she has nothing to do with this. She has a responsibility—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I do find it strange that the member opposite is suggesting that we investigate, convict and jail someone. That's not how we do business on this side of the House.

Let me reiterate: Hiring decisions are local decisions, made by the local hospitals. The College of Physicians and Surgeons—

Interjections.

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

It is very difficult for me to seize control at all when I've got members on the government side, while the minister is answering, provoking and the other people accepting the provocation and responding. Not while the minister is answering or when the question is being put; I think it's less than polite.

Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Just to reiterate, physician accreditation is the sole and independent responsibility of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est également pour la ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre has been in crisis for almost a month. This crisis means there are no beds available for patients who need to be admitted. It means cancelled surgeries. It means that patients are being cared for in hallways. The hospital is 54 beds over capacity, and there are 64 people waiting for placement.

The minister can talk a good game about investing in long-term care, but clearly this talk hasn't resulted in action on the ground. Can the minister explain what she is doing to address the crisis faced by Thunder Bay?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for this question. This is a question that has been raised by my colleagues the member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan and the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North. There is very much an issue in Thunder Bay. I can tell you that the LHIN, the hospital and the other providers in the area are very much focusing on resolving the issues that have been raised.

We have come a long way when it comes to providing more supports at home to free up hospital beds, but I must say that in Thunder Bay I acknowledge there is a problem that we are very focused on resolving.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, the hospital in Thunder Bay is struggling, and it's doing its best to cope, but they can only do so much when dozens of patients are stuck in hallways because they have nowhere to go. In the hospital, hallway nursing is not quality care.

This government promised to address wait times for home care, but clearly something is not working. We are just on the cusp of flu season, and Thunder Bay residents need to know that their hospital will be there for them in their time of need.

I ask the Minister of Health again: What is her plan to address the health crisis in Thunder Bay?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again, thank you to the member opposite. This is an issue, as I have said, that has been brought to my attention by our members, the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan and the member from Thunder Bay–Superior North.

Our LHIN is very focused on resolving these issues. These are complex problems. We are opening new long-term-care beds in Thunder Bay. There is good progress being made, but clearly there is more to do, and we're committed to doing that work.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Ma question est pour la ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement, l'honorable Linda Jeffrey. Recently, Friday, November 22 was National Housing Day—an important topic and a fundamental right for Ontarians because, of course, everybody deserves to have safe and secure housing.

In my own riding of Etobicoke North, our government has made significant investments, such as the recently finished renovations on affordable housing units at 2667 and 2677 Kipling Avenue, but, Speaker, as you'll appreciate, there is still more work to be done. This is especially important and part of a just society; when people live in safe and affordable housing, our communities thrive.

Good housing promotes health, safety, and physical and emotional well-being, and we know that children even do better in school. Speaker, through you to the minister: Could she explain to my constituents in Etobicoke North what investments our government is making to ensure that Ontarians have access to affordable housing?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I really want to thank the member for the question.

Tackling homelessness is a very important issue to our government, because there is nothing more distressing than the thought of a child, a senior or a family being unsure of where they're going to sleep at night. That's why we've invested over \$3 billion in affordable housing since 2003.

That investment is the largest in our province's history. It's meant that we've been able to create more than 17,000 affordable housing units and repaired more than a quarter of a million social and affordable housing units.

By investing in Ontarians, we make sure that they have access to affordable housing, and we can ensure that

they are better prepared to enter the workforce, because having a place to call home is the first step out of poverty. It is the first step to realizing new opportunities. It is the first step to a better quality of life.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I appreciate, Madam Minister, your response about our government's investments. Ontario's most vulnerable, of course, deserve this, but I raise a genuine concern in this chamber for all parties to consider: Despite the significant investment that Ontario has made, the federal Conservative government has largely failed to tackle this pressing issue. Canada remains the only G8 nation that does not have a national housing strategy, which, of course, undermines the progress that we have made in Ontario, leading to a piecemeal, band-aid solution approach.

1120

The feds also ignore calls from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as well as the city of Toronto, to have a stable and long-term funding source so that we can make the necessary long-term investments in affordable housing.

Speaker, I would invite the minister to share with this chamber about her recent excursion to Ottawa and the meetings that she had with her counterparts at the federal level.

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: While I was in Ottawa last week, I reiterated our government's call to the federal government to come up with a stable long-term solution to homelessness in Ontario. But despite my invitation for a conversation, the minister failed to meet with me—a failure that has occurred since December 2009, which was the last time the federal Conservatives sat down with the provinces and territories to talk about homelessness. This, despite the fact that last month, Minister Candice Bergen told the National Conference on Ending Homelessness that the federal government is looking for even more ways to support communities in developing solutions to homelessness.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I have a suggestion for Minister Bergen: Talk to the provinces. Pick up the phone and talk to us. For too long, Ontarians have failed to receive the attention and the investments that we need and deserve from the federal government.

Our government will continue to stand up for Ontario's most vulnerable.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Tim Hudak: My question is to the Premier, with respect to a new regional hospital in south Niagara. Yesterday was, as I termed it, put-up-or-shut-up day when it comes to the new hospital in south Niagara. You ask me why I say, "Put up or shut up"? Because you guys have been kind of on the fence on this issue. Witness the February article in the Niagara Falls Review: "Wynne Off to Rocky Start on Hospital File

"Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, in her first week on the job, threw cold water on the proposed south Niag-

ara hospital and set back hospital reform in Niagara two years."

We're trying to get a positive answer, get you off that fence a little bit. Conveniently, yesterday, when we had the put-up-or-shut-up motion in the House, the minister announced that she was finally looking at a programming grant for that hospital.

Let me ask you this: How much exactly will that planning grant be worth, when will you actually make that announcement, and is it actually budgeted in the Ministry of Health budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I cannot tell you how refreshing it is to hear the Leader of the Opposition advocating for hospital capital projects. I have to say this is just fantastic news. It is interesting that he's focusing on one particular hospital in a riding that happens to be in a by-election situation, but I'm sure his passion will be just as strong for the other hospital projects that are out there as well. I know the member from Grey-Bruce would love to hear a question from you on the Markdale hospital, for example.

I am happy to say that we are going to be looking forward to taking the next step when it comes to the new hospital in Niagara. That's an exciting initiative, and I'm really pleased that we're moving to one more new hospital in a long, long line of new hospitals that were built under this government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Tim Hudak: I don't think I actually got a straight answer there, Speaker, so let me try again—and in answer to your question, yes, I'm confident that a PC government will get our economy growing, set priorities and build other projects around the province.

The problem is that the only way to get you guys to do something is when a seat is at risk. The only way to actually get you to do something, like a subway to Scarborough, is when you're worried about losing a seat. Witness in Windsor: When you had a seat at risk in Windsor, you suddenly moved with great speed to announce a mega hospital for Windsor. You announced the planning grant there and the millions of dollars in a matter of months.

Dr. Smith's report has been out for over a year now, and you still won't answer the basic questions. Now, I caution you: Don't do what the NDP is doing. They're trying to be all things to all people, everything under the sun. Their main motive? Protecting the seat of the member from Welland, as opposed to what's in the best interests of health care for the people in Niagara region. I know the game they're playing; I just want to know what you're playing.

You did for Windsor during a by-election. Whatever the cause, by-election or not, it's the right thing to do. Will you green-light that plan—

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

Interjections.

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

Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm just going to suggest that the Leader of the Opposition talk to some of his colleagues who actually have been proud to be at the opening of hospitals in their communities.

Maybe you could speak to the member from Barrie. He was there and happy to be at the opening of that hospital.

The member from Cambridge, I think, will be very pleased with the redevelopment moving ahead in Cambridge.

Just yesterday, I was in Burlington with the member from Burlington—a Conservative member—where we talked about re-scoping the project at Burlington so they will have a brand new emergency department, a seven-storey tower. This is all good news.

I've been in Milton with the member from Halton, who has been very pleased to be there for the groundbreaking or the ribbon-cutting, whatever it is.

We are building hospitals across this province. Welcome to the party—a little bit late, but welcome.

LONG-TERM CARE

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Recent reports from Hamilton tell us that our area is among the worst in Ontario when it comes to seniors finding a space in a long-term-care home.

In the Hamilton area, seniors can expect to wait up to three and a half years to get placed. They're being subjected to terrible stress and crisis before being forced to jump through never-ending hoops in order to get the care they need. The local CCAC has said that their hands are tied by government legislation. Is the minister going to address the problems that are forcing seniors into homelessness and other terrible situations?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you for the question. I would be very interested if there were cases of seniors being forced into homelessness. I would hope that the member opposite would bring that to my attention.

I think it's important to note that yes, there is a wait for long-term care. But thankfully, as a result of the superb work that is being done by our LHINs, our CCACs and the organizations that they're responsible for, we are seeing the wait-times for long-term-care homes decline. That's an extraordinary change. It's happening because we are spending more to get more people the care they need in their own homes. This is a foundational part of our transformation of our health care system to provide the right care at the right time in the right place, and the right place is home, whenever possible.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: As the crisis in long-term care unfolds, we are hearing of ridiculous decisions being made that bump seniors who have already been on the wait-list for years.

After four years, 92-year-old Marion Forrest finally got a space, but the day before she was supposed to move

in, she was taken to the hospital. Due to her very short stay in the hospital, she wasn't able to be there during that move, and she lost her space. She ended up with nowhere to live.

Eighty-eight-year-old Antoniette Di Falco was given two possible placements. Both of them were entirely inappropriate. One was in a unit for Alzheimer's and dementia, which she does not have, and the other one was to be shared with a woman who has to live in total darkness at all times. Because she rejected these two offers, she was kicked off the waiting list.

Again, I will ask the minister to end this shameful treatment of our seniors and ensure that the long-term-care system works for them and not against them.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Absolutely. I think the member opposite would acknowledge that we have opened 500 long-term-care beds in Hamilton since 2003, so we are making progress.

I also want to clarify that if someone is in a hospital and cannot move into a long-term-care home, they retain their space on that wait-list, so they will be cared for until another vacancy comes up and they can move into the long-term-care home of their choice.

We're doing our very best to provide the right care for seniors, and we will continue this work. It's important work. I think it's important that the member opposite actually understands the policy.

1130

GREAT LAKES WATER QUALITY

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I've got a question this morning for the Minister of the Environment. Over the years, constituents from my riding of Oakville and the region of Halton have been raising serious concerns regarding the toxic contamination of the Randle Reef, located just down Lake Ontario's shoreline, in Hamilton.

The sediment at the Randle Reef site in Hamilton harbour is contaminated with coal tar. Chemicals in coal tar are toxic, obviously, and they're harmful to aquatic life in the harbour. With the cleanup of the Sydney, Nova Scotia, tar ponds in progress, the Randle Reef site is now the largest coal-tar-contaminated sediment site in all of Canada.

Speaker, through you, would the minister share with the House what the Ontario government is doing to protect the health of Lake Ontario and its aquatic life from the contaminated Randle Reef in Hamilton harbour?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I would like to thank the member for what is an excellent question.

The provincial government, as members of the House would know, is committed to the remediation of contaminated sites all over the Great Lakes. The province of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Environment, has committed to an investment of \$46.3 million for the cleanup of Randle Reef in Hamilton harbour.

The Ministry of the Environment has partnered with Environment Canada and others, including municipal partners in the city of Hamilton, the city of Burlington

and region of Halton, US Steel Canada and the Hamilton Port Authority. I'm pleased that all funding partners have now finalized agreements to move forward with the cleanup.

The cleanup of Randle Reef represents a significant step towards delisting Hamilton harbour as an area of concern. We look forward to working with all partners as this project moves forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: That's excellent news about the commitment to the remediation of Randle Reef. I think all constituents are going to be pleased to hear that this contamination down the shore is a very important concern of the government and is going to be dealt with appropriately.

Changing the image of Hamilton harbour to a place with restored water quality and sustainable ecosystems should also increase property values and should lead to the growth of commercial business.

Constituents in my riding of Oakville understand the importance of the Great Lakes to this province. They understand that the Great Lakes provide drinking water to more than 80% of the people of Ontario, as well as recreation, power generation and economic prosperity. But they also understand that the Great Lakes are in trouble. So, Speaker, through you, would the minister explain what the government is doing to ensure that the Randle Reef exercise in remediation is not the end and that the work continues?

Hon. James J. Bradley: This government recognizes that the Great Lakes are vitally important to the people of Ontario for our drinking water, for our quality of life and our prosperity.

Scientists tell us, however, that we're facing new challenges that are overwhelming old solutions. We need new initiatives to restore and protect the Great Lakes. That is why we've introduced Bill 6, the proposed Great Lakes Protection Act. The Great Lakes Protection Act is designed to give the province new tools to restore and protect our Great Lakes so they are drinkable, swimmable and fishable.

We are grateful to all members of this House for their input on Bill 6. I think we have an opportunity, together, to achieve considerable success in this province with the passing of this legislation.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: My question is to the Minister of the Environment. Minister, the Clarington transformer station was to be built on the Oak Ridges moraine and has been before your ministry for about four or five years.

Originally, this plan was a small-scale transformer station and received the appropriate environmental assessment. However, Hydro One has since then increased the size of the transformer station without the necessary environmental assessments.

The Oak Ridges moraine is home, as you know, to the largest aquifer in North America.

Dr. John Cherry, an expert in hydrogeology from the University of Guelph, was retained by the Enniskillen Environmental Association to conduct an independent review of the environmental studies to date. Dr. Cherry concluded that the class environmental assessment was completely inadequate.

Insufficient well-monitoring infrastructure has been installed and the appropriate hydraulic study has not been conducted. The cost of the project will vastly exceed the original estimate of \$280 million.

Minister, I ask you to ask Hydro One to move the transformer station from the Oak Ridges moraine and protect the drinking water of millions of people in Ontario.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I want to inform the House, first of all, that the member has taken the opportunity to communicate with me on numerous occasions about this by means of letters, which have been forthcoming, so I want to recognize that that has happened so far.

The environmental assessment process requires projects to be developed in a way that is protective of human health and the environment, and time is taken to ensure that all of these standards and objectives are met.

The Ministry of the Environment has received some 56 requests asking that an individual environmental assessment is undertaken for the proposed Clarington transformer station. The Ministry of the Environment officials are now reviewing those requests, and all input will be given very serious consideration before a determination is made as to the bump-up request.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much for that response and the compliment, Minister.

But, Minister, last week the vice-president of the OPA, the Ontario Power Authority, Amir Shalaby, was addressing the Durham Strategic Energy Alliance. Of course, the main topic of the day was the uncertainty around the nuclear energy sector, completely. However, at the meeting, Mr. Shalaby stated, and I quote the media report, that "the OPA supports Hydro One's plan to build the station on the Oak Ridges moraine in Clarington."

This raises the question of a senior executive at the OPA making an open statement about his approval long before this approval you've just addressed has even been brought to the attention of the minister, I'm sure, and before the ministry's assessment to review process.

I'm asking you today to do due diligence on the progress. Look at options for the relocation of this site long before you forge ahead and ruin the aquifers on the Oak Ridges moraine, or at least do the appropriate studies.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Of course, that is why we have a very comprehensive and extensive environmental assessment process, which often is criticized by members of the member's party. I know he hasn't done so, but some of his other colleagues are very critical of the environmental assessment process.

I want to say to the member that the 56 requests asking for the individual environmental assessment are all being given various consideration. The individual to whom he

had made reference has no more influence or sway over this particular decision than any of the 56 people who have already asked that there be a consideration for what we call a bump-up, or more extensive individual environmental assessment. I want to assure the member, that consideration will be very serious and extensive.

LEGAL AID

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Attorney General. There are legal aid clinics in our communities that provide an integral and fundamental service. They provide us with access to justice. There are clinics that provide services to historically vulnerable groups like aboriginal people, seniors and the disabled, and there are those groups that provide services to geographic areas.

In the region of Peel, we have two centres, but based on population—the region of Peel has 1.3 million residents. However, when we look at funding, we receive half of the funding of other municipalities when it comes to a per capita basis. Fair share for Peel is not a strange issue to Peel. We've been underfunded on many issues, in many areas.

I'm asking the minister today: Will he commit to ensuring that the residents of Peel receive their fair share when it comes to access to justice?

Hon. John Gerretsen: As the member well knows, we are committed to making sure that legal aid is available throughout the province of Ontario for those individuals who need it. It's with that in mind that this government—even in tough economic times, when our budget isn't balanced yet—allocated an additional \$30 million specifically for family law and to the legal aid clinics. We have been working with Legal Aid Ontario over the last four to five months, since the budget was passed, to make sure that the funding goes to those clinics that need the funding.

The Ministry of the Attorney General truly believes in the clinic system. We want to fund them, and that's why the additional funding was made available. I'm sure that Peel will get its appropriate resources.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1139 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. Michael Harris: I rise today in the Legislature to call on all members of this House to work together to make sure an important piece of legislation is moved closer towards becoming law. In fact, I'm speaking about Bill 69, the Prompt Payment Act. It passed second reading with unanimous support back on May 16. Since then, I've received a stack of letters, literally, to my constituency office from local contractors, asking me why it

isn't a priority to the government to proceed to third and final reading.

Instead, we see symbolic government legislation clogging our committees, rather than bills directly affecting jobs and the economy and good local employers in—across Ontario, as a matter of fact. Bill 69 contributes to employment, apprenticeship growth and investment in Ontario-made machinery, and allows our businesses to bid on more projects so they can grow and prosper.

According to a letter I received from a company in my riding, Dordan Mechanical, in fact, 31 states have prompt payment for the private sector, while 49 states and the feds have this for publicly funded infrastructure projects. The list goes on, with Australia, New Zealand etc. Clearly, it is time for Ontario to catch up with our global competitors before it is too late.

In fact, as one business—Kappeler Masonry in my riding—put it, “As a business, nothing is more important than our cash flow. When that becomes uncertain, every decision we make becomes more risky and more costly.” I've heard from many other great contractors from my riding, like Ball Construction, G&A Masonry and the Grand Valley Construction Association. This needs to be made a priority, Speaker. I know you know that.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Jonah Schein: This morning, Campaign 2000 released its annual report card that measures child and family poverty in Ontario. Today's report card showed that one in seven children in this province remain in poverty, and that 35% of people using food banks in Ontario are children.

Instead of making investments to reduce poverty, this government is failing to address the inadequacy of minimum wage, social assistance and child benefits, and it continues to make damaging cuts to programs like the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit.

Rather than invest in food security and health promotion, this government spends our money to treat sickness. Last year, diabetes cost Ontario \$5.6 billion, according to the Canadian Diabetes Association.

While the government fails to understand or prioritize food security, people across this province do. In recent weeks, I've met with grade 5 students in my riding at St. Clare Catholic School and at Dewson Street Public School. These young people understand the injustice of seeing classmates arrive at school hungry. They feel the stigma and shame when they can't afford to pay school fees for things like snack programs.

This month in Windsor, delegates from Sustain Ontario's “Bring Food Home” conference sent a clear message back to Toronto. They said it's time to take action to make sure that children in Ontario have access to food and food education in their schools.

A recent Healthy Kids Panel report called on this government to take action to reduce poverty and to establish a universal student nutrition program for all publicly funded elementary and secondary schools in Ontario,

including in First Nations communities. The report is called No Time to Wait, and that is a message that I hope this government will finally hear.

DR. NORMAN BETHUNE
COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise today to share good news from Dr. Norman Bethune Collegiate in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt. This high school is recognized for excellence in many areas, such as arts, music, science and sports.

This year, Dr. Norman Bethune is recognized as having the largest DECA chapter in the city of Toronto. DECA stands for Demonstrating Excellence, Celebrating Achievement, and is a high school club for business students. At Bethune, this club was started eight years ago, and now has over 150 students competing in categories such as entrepreneurship, marketing, business law and ethics, hospitality and management.

Recently, Bethune's DECA students competed at the Toronto regional competition. I am happy to inform the House that over 40 Bethune students received top-10 medals in the various categories. The students will be competing in the provincial competition in February 2014. The final level of competition is an opportunity to represent Canada in Atlanta, Georgia, in April 2014.

I want to acknowledge the leadership of principal Sandy Kaskens, teacher Krista Yeung and the entire Dr. Norman Bethune high school and the students at the DECA club.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure everyone in this House would like to join me in congratulating and wishing the Bethune students much success in the provincial competition.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Six, years ago, a once-in-a-lifetime mining discovery was made in Ontario's Far North, and we call it, of course, the Ring of Fire—six years, Speaker.

Since then, we've come no further in seeing it become a reality, and the blame lays squarely at the feet of this government. In fact, with the Cliffs announcement last week, we may actually have taken a step backwards.

City council in Sudbury was certainly concerned. On October 29, Sudbury city council passed an urgent resolution on the Ring of Fire. It stated, and I'll read it here, "that the provincial government be requested to make the Ring of Fire a priority and take immediate action to work with all parties to resolve outstanding issues, including the question of the proposed north-south transportation corridor." Sadly, Speaker, Sudbury's issue and their motion fell on deaf ears, and we saw the results with Cliffs last week.

As Sudbury council noted, the chromite project was expected to directly employ over 1,200 people across northern Ontario, with over \$3 billion in capital spend-

ing, creating 2,500 construction jobs. Now that resulting wealth and prosperity are in doubt.

Whether it's the Ring of Fire, the Far North Act, closed forestry mills and tourist centres, bungled wildlife management or the ONTC fire sale, this government has, plain and simple, failed northern Ontario. The Ontario PC s have a plan, and we'll see it through.

WORTLEY VILLAGE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The world now knows what we in London have known for a very long time. Earlier this month, Wortley Village, a wonderful community tucked away in Old South within my riding of London West, was recognized as the best neighbourhood in Canada in the annual Great Places competition sponsored by the Canadian Institute of Planners.

Of the 68 communities nominated for this award, Wortley Village rose to the top for two main reasons.

First, it feels like a community. Every day, you'll see people walking or biking to work or to shop. You'll see friends chatting over coffee in a village bakery or enjoying a great restaurant meal. You'll see neighbours gathering for festivals or recreational activities on the beautiful village green. You'll see parents walking their kids to school and people walking their dogs at night.

The second reason is the diversity and vitality of its residents and businesses. Mixed housing options enable people of different ages, occupations and socio-economic backgrounds to participate and contribute. Unique businesses, interesting stores and an eclectic array of services sustain a thriving local economy. People who live in the village care about supporting each other and supporting their neighbourhood.

I urge all members to visit Wortley Village and experience it for themselves. It is diverse, accessible, participatory and inclusive. I want to recognize and thank the Wortley Village BIA and the Old South Community Organization for their efforts in making this award happen, and the Canadian Institute of Planners for recognizing London's hidden gem.

ROTARY CLUBS AUCTION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I stand today to recognize the Rotary Clubs of Toronto's successful TV auction this past weekend, broadcast on Rogers TV across the GTA on Saturday night and all day Sunday. The auction was sponsored by five Rotary clubs in Toronto, including the Scarborough Twilight Club, from my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood.

On the Saturday evening of the auction, I had the pleasure of sitting at the anchor desk and hosting the auction. I was pleased to be joined by Penny Williams, a Rotarian in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood.

The proceeds from the Rotary auction go toward community charities in Toronto such as the Scarborough youth services and Galloway arts in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. In fact, one of the charities

supported is the Future Aces Scholarship Foundation; I'm pleased to note that I was one of its first recipients while in high school in Scarborough.

The exact figures are still being calculated, but I'm happy to report that over \$100,000 has been raised for the Toronto community charities. Thank you to Rogers TV, all the generous donors and the five Rotary clubs for sponsoring this tremendous event. Our communities truly are better places because of your dedication to service and your generosity of spirit.

1510

HOME CARE

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I rise today to share a serious concern of my constituents who rely on the community care access centre for home care services when they've been released from hospital. I've been hearing from residents in Dufferin-Caledon who have experienced a significant decrease in the services that the CCAC provide, including services on the weekend. The problem is that now Dufferin-Caledon residents are struggling without the required care they should be receiving.

One Dufferin resident who recently contacted me was shocked that her home care hours were dramatically reduced, and the CCAC told her they would not be delivering services on the weekends. She was even told, "She would have to make do herself." Speaker, the notion that an individual who requires home care every day—Monday to Friday—can then somehow make do without home care on the weekend is nonsensical at best and downright shameful at worst. Does a wound not hurt on Saturday? Is a bath not needed on Sunday?

Who is making decisions about patient care, and when will this government step up and prioritize health care dollars, not on more administration and bureaucracy, but on front-line health care services like home care? We've all read too many stories in the newspaper about our health care's bloated bureaucracy, long wait-lists and home care services that fail to meet patient needs. People not receiving health care because it is the weekend would certainly qualify as failing to meet patient's needs.

The bottom line is that Dufferin-Caledon residents believe they deserve far better from their provincial government, and I completely agree with them.

FROMAGERIE ST-ALBERT

M. Grant Crack: Je suis fier de vous parler aujourd'hui d'une institution ontarienne et une icône locale dans ma circonscription de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell que vous connaissez tous: la fameuse Fromagerie St-Albert.

I'm very pleased to rise today in the House to talk about an Ontario institution and an icon in my riding of Glengarry-Prescott-Russell: la Fromagerie St-Albert, in beautiful St. Albert, Ontario.

As we all know, particularly from sampling their delicious cheeses at my annual Glengarry-Prescott-

Russell day here in the Legislature, Fromagerie St-Albert is a premier maker of delicious cheese made right here in Ontario. As early as the end of the 19th century, master cheese makers were already manufacturing a highly renowned cheddar, the St. Albert. Five generations of farmers and craftsmen have faithfully lived up to the St. Albert tradition of quality established by its founders in 1894.

La fromagerie a malheureusement été victime d'un feu en février dernier, un feu qui a tout détruit.

Sadly, however, earlier in the year, a devastating fire destroyed the factory. However, I'm happy to report that reconstruction is well under way. A new cheese plant, museum and restaurant will be built in St. Albert, replacing the old factory. Officials held a sod-turning ceremony with local residents, factory employees and firefighters to help announce the \$30-million new investment in the project. A total of 72,000-square-foot, the cheese plant will include state-of-the-art equipment and technology. Production is scheduled at the start of the summer of 2014.

Je suis extrêmement fier de la communauté de St-Albert qui s'est rassemblée et qui s'est soutenue dans ce moment difficile.

ROYAL AGRICULTURAL WINTER FAIR

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's the most wonderful time of the year. Now some of you might think I'm referring to Christmas, but today I'm specifically talking about when country comes to the city to recognize and celebrate the best of the best at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Today, I'd like to share with you some of the recent successes that the folks from my riding had at this past fair.

Speaker, these premier shows mean so much to so many, but specifically to the 4-H members. These shows give young community leaders a chance to shine; 4-H does an amazing job teaching young people the valuable life skills of public speaking, decision-making and how to be a valued member of the community.

I'd like to recognize the following: the Wawanosh club for winning the provincial Go for the Gold competition; Gary Finlay from Huron county, who won the Grand Champion Showperson rights at the TD Junior Sheep Show.

Renee Robinson from Huron county won the grand champion market animal and Stacey Robinson from Huron county won the reserve grand champion market animal in the Ontario Junior Barrow Show. Alyssa Cronin from Huron county won the Reserve Grand Champion Showperson at the Ontario Junior Barrow Show, and Ashton Colvin from Bruce county won Grand Champion Showperson at the Queen's Guineas competition.

Bruce county also placed first in the Herdsmen competition in the Queen's Guineas. Melissa MacIntyre had the Champion Limousin Heifer at the national beef heifer

show. And I'd be remiss, Speaker, if I didn't recognize the success in the open shows as well.

And congratulations to the Baird brothers of Turnberry township, when their horse Keenan was chosen as the senior champion stallion in the Clydesdale show.

Katie Falconer, from Teeswater, won reserve grand champion in the open Simmental show.

As you can see, Speaker, a lot of champions come from Huron-Bruce, and I congratulate them all.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure on a point of order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, with your guidance—I missed introductions. My dear friend Kim Dier, who is a constituent, is coming down for a visit; she'll be here shortly. She's also the fiancée of Iain Myrans, my chief of staff. It's her first time in the Legislature, and I would like to welcome her.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS TAX CREDIT ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LE CRÉDIT D'IMPÔT FAVORISANT LA RÉUSSITE SCOLAIRE

Mr. Leone moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 140, An Act to amend the Taxation Act, 2007 to implement a promoting educational success tax credit / *Projet de loi 140, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les impôts pour instaurer un crédit d'impôt favorisant la réussite scolaire.*

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Rob Leone: This is a bill designed to incent employees, by way of their employers, to obtain their high school diplomas. We know that higher educational attainment improves literacy, improves productivity, improves earnings and improves workplace safety. It also boosts educational attainment in children, and that's one of the things that I think this bill promises to do. It also fosters a culture of learning in the home, which is so very important.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR JOBS AND PROSPERITY ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR L'INFRASTRUCTURE AU SERVICE DE L'EMPLOI ET DE LA PROSPÉRITÉ

Mr. Murray moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 141, An Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2013 / *Projet de loi 141, Loi édictant la Loi de 2013 sur l'infrastructure au service de l'emploi et de la prospérité.*

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. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I'll make my statement under ministerial statements.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I rise today to introduce the proposed Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2013. The bill contains a series of principles, requirements and authorities that, if passed, would promote strategic infrastructure planning and investment in Ontario.

Our government is committed to building public infrastructure that creates jobs in a modern economy. That is why we have invested more than \$85 billion in public infrastructure since 2003. We recognize the needs of all Ontario communities and businesses and have committed to invest more than \$35 billion over the next three years, including about \$13.5 billion in this fiscal year alone. These infrastructure investments support jobs as we build new schools, new hospitals, new highways, new transit and so much more. This is consistent with Building Together, Ontario's first long-term infrastructure plan, which was released two years ago.

1520

Every dollar we spend must work hard for the people of this province. We must optimize the quality and location of each project we invest in to maximize growth within Ontario's economy.

This proposed act is about continuous improvement in strategic, evidence-based and long-term infrastructure planning. Put simply, this is a milestone opportunity to ensure that principled, long-term infrastructure planning is not just an ongoing priority but a legislative requirement. This means that every project our government invests in, whether in Toronto or Timmins, aligns with demographic, economic and environmental trends and the long-term needs of Ontarians.

On that note, promoting excellence in infrastructure design is a key component of the proposed bill. Better design of signature, government-owned transportation, arts, museum and heritage infrastructure projects can save money over time. This is money we can invest back in services that Ontarians need, like health care, education and transportation.

Moreover, the proposed legislation would require government to involve apprenticeships in the construction of

provincial infrastructure assets as part of our commitment to provide opportunities for young people. It would allow them to get both their registered trade and apprenticeship requirements completed.

According to the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, we will be creating, over the next three years, 1.3 million skilled jobs in Canada—about half of them here in Ontario, which is actually more than there are unemployed people in Ontario. To that end, we require apprenticeship positions to deal with these vacancies and keep our economy growing. Apprenticeships, skills and training, and youth employment are key parts of building a well-educated, highly skilled workforce.

With our eyes cast to the future, the province's long-term infrastructure plans would have to be at least 10 years' duration under the proposed act. Subject to the approval of the Legislature, the first plan would have to be tabled in this Legislature within three years and then every five years thereafter. This keeps our government transparent and assures Ontarians that we recognize the need for long-term and stable infrastructure funding.

Altogether, the proposed bill, if passed, would help to leverage the best possible economic, cultural and environmental outcomes from the province's infrastructure investments.

Just concluding, I'd like to pay a bit of tribute to two people whom I have admired as great city builders, to whom I think this act is dedicated, and they come from the history of Ontario—where we'd like to get back. One was R.C. Harris, who's famous for the Prince Edward Viaduct, which you may know as the Bloor viaduct, and for the Harris treatment plant. It was the last time we did integrated transportation planning, where we actually built our subways—we planned a subway 100 years ago. That passed a referendum in 1913, and they planned for a subway platform which was built. It wasn't until 1966—over 50 years later—that the subway was there.

This is what we want to get back to. We don't want to widen highways to be 25 lanes wide. We want to get back to integrated transportation and land use planning, and we need the evidence to do it.

Mr. Harris also introduced innovation. Today, we go to Singapore to see Canadian water technology demonstrated in a water treatment plant. The Harris plant here was open to the public so that businesses and people who wanted to invest could see state-of-the-art Canadian technologies.

We also know that we've got to get the \$13 billion or \$14 billion that we're spending on infrastructure working not just to leave hospitals, bridges and clean water systems in each of our communities but to leave a legacy of skilled jobs behind. We think this will be a huge accelerator for apprenticeships and employment for young people who have been left out of the economy.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, to Edmund Burke—not the philosopher but the great Canadian architect who introduced curtain walls to Canada on the Simpsons building, who actually is the architect and designer, with Thomas Taylor, of this great bridge of the viaduct. It was the first

time that engineers and architects had collaborated on such major skill sets and brought designers into it.

So we're going back to something that is a very Ontario notion: Reintroducing architects and designers to save money, improve design and give us infrastructure, bridges and public spaces equal to Paris, London, Chicago or any of the small or large cities around the world.

Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure. I want to thank my critics as well for their indulgence and for their thoughtfulness in the comments that they've already given to me privately, and I look forward to both of their interventions.

God bless, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

NATIONAL HOUSING DAY

Hon. John Gerretsen: Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to make a statement on behalf of the Honourable Linda Jeffrey, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, on National Housing Day, which occurred last Friday, on November 22. The minister, unfortunately, has been delayed, and I would like to make this statement on her behalf, which I believe to be within the rules of practice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is.

Hon. John Gerretsen: It gives me great pleasure to address the Legislature to mark National Housing Day, which took place this past Friday, on November 22.

National Housing Day recognizes the important and meaningful steps that we have taken to develop social and affordable housing in Canada and here in Ontario. It's a day to celebrate our successes and the real positive change we can make in our communities, and while it's an ongoing challenge to ensure that every person and family, from our children to our elders, has a safe place to call home, it's a challenge I know we're all determined to take on in this House.

Today, I want to draw attention to an urgent issue that affects all of us. Social housing projects across our province are at risk of losing their federal funding. I want to make a clear distinction between the two streams of funding that Ottawa provides for social and affordable housing.

One of the pots of money is called the Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario Program. Those funds go directly towards building and repairing affordable housing units and provide rental and down payment assistance to households in need.

But here is what worries the minister and myself, and as a former Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and a former chairman of the Ontario Housing Corp., I know of what we're speaking about here: There is another and larger stream of money from the federal government that currently goes towards the operating costs of existing social housing. In a very practical sense, these funds enable residents to pay their rent on a rent-geared-to-income basis, and if the federal government in Ottawa doesn't change its course, those subsidies are scheduled

to evaporate, because these housing units have been around for so long.

Over a quarter of a billion dollars of federal social housing funding to Ontario will disappear over the next 10 years. That's more than a 50% reduction in funding. Indeed, some subsidies have already expired. In those buildings, the mortgages have been paid off, but the maintenance costs never go away. As a matter of fact, as the housing gets older, the maintenance cost gets higher.

The loss of these subsidies is taking a toll on social housing providers, on families and obviously on the communities in which they are located across Ontario. That's why it's so distressing to me and to the minister that despite this pressing need, the minister's invitation to Minister Jason Kenney to sit down and deal with this important issue has gone unanswered.

People living in social housing need to know that the people they elect are looking out for them. Our government listens to this call, which is why our funding commitment of nearly \$3 billion is the largest affordable housing program in the province's history, but for the sake of Canada's economic stability and growth, now more than ever we need a national housing plan—many, many organizations have called for this, including the provincial government—one that includes the creation of new affordable housing opportunities and one that maintains our existing social housing projects.

Affordable housing is an essential component of a strong overall housing market that creates jobs, grows the economy and provides good housing for those who need it in our country and province. That's why we're urging the federal government to return to the table as a long-term housing partner.

Interjection.

Hon. John Gerretsen: It's not just the provinces and territories that are voicing their concern. Earlier this fall, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities took a stand and issued a statement calling for a long-term federal commitment to housing, and just last week, the city of Toronto brought its Close the Housing Gap campaign to Parliament Hill, calling for new long-term funding available for social and affordable housing.

It's a joint responsibility between the province and the federal government, as the member opposite well knows.

In honour of National Housing Day, I want to reaffirm this government's commitment to work together to provide long-term, predictable funding for social and affordable housing that works for the people of Ontario and Canada. I invite all members in this House to join me in calling on the federal government to stop walking away from Canada's most vulnerable residents. There is no better time than the present to act; so says the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

1530

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

Mr. Frank Klees: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Frank Klees: Given the importance of the subject matter before us and given the fact that the government has allocated some 15 minutes for making the statement, I would ask for unanimous consent that each of our critics on these two files be given a minimum of five minutes for their response.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll wait for attention. The member from Newmarket–Aurora is seeking unanimous consent to extend the time to five minutes per member for each of the topics. Do we agree? I heard a no.

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

Mr. Frank Klees: That's very disappointing, but we'll have to find some other way to express our opinions on this bill.

I will start by saying this: Certainly we welcome the principle behind what the Minister of Infrastructure is proposing, that there be long-term plans. What is absolutely beyond my comprehension is that it will take three years before we get a 10-year plan from this government. I'm not sure what they have planned for the next three years, but I would have thought that over the last 10 years they would have had some time to put in place a 10-year plan. Apparently it will take them some three years to come up with that. I would also like to see a 10-year plan or a plan of any kind to balance the budget of this province, which we're also not hearing from this government.

I'd like to speak specifically to what, again, I agree, in principle, is the right thing to do, and that is to ensure that the decisions about infrastructure projects are based on transparent information. In the bill, I see that there will be four conditions that are proposed: an inventory of the infrastructure, an evaluation of the infrastructure, the age of the infrastructure assets and the condition of those infrastructure assets—all critical.

What is missing in this bill, however, is any reference to an asset management program. If we're going to have the information that the minister refers to in this bill, what we need is a formalized asset management program that will not simply be an option for either the province or the municipalities, but would be mandatory. Until such time as we get to the point where we have a mandatory asset management program so that we know what the inventory and what the condition of our various infrastructure assets are, we'll never get to the point of being able to make proper decisions about investment in inventory. I defer to my colleague.

NATIONAL HOUSING DAY

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a pleasure to respond to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing on the occasion of National Housing Day, which was celebrated across Canada last Friday.

It is easy at times to take our home for granted. A stable place to call home provides a family with better

prospects and improved hope for what tomorrow may bring. Access to housing in Ontario, especially in rapidly growing areas such as the GTA, is becoming an issue. The price inflation that comes with a rapidly growing municipality has caused both prices and rents to increase. According to many measures, a family's rent is considered unaffordable if it exceeds 30% of their monthly take-home pay.

In downtown Toronto and areas well served by transit, this figure is easily exceeded for families on low-income, social assistance recipients and pensioners. Many homeowners are finding it difficult to retain their ownership and the independence that it brings. The tax burden and the cost of energy are forcing them into the trade-offs that we see in this province. Every week, I see people in my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, in my office or on the phone, especially seniors on fixed incomes, saying that they are faced each week with deciding whether they should be paying for groceries or paying their hydro bill.

So what can we do as legislators? Building new units must be cheaper and faster. Renting must be easier and disputes resolved more swiftly. Alternative housing arrangements, such as co-op housing, must be encouraged. Maintenance of both rented and owned properties must be easier to access, and cheaper. The burden of taxes, fees and energy costs must decrease.

In addition, we cannot lose sight of the fact that downtown areas in growing cities will generally become more expensive, but low-income families cannot be denied access to the economic opportunities that cities' development brings. Efficient and present transit allows all residents, including the cheaper suburbs, to benefit from the economic opportunities that will come our way once the province regains its competitiveness.

Good housing can only stem from good policy. The Ontario PC caucus will continue to work to that end.

INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'll rise today to offer some initial comments about the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, announced by Minister Murray earlier today at some site off-campus, somewhere in downtown Toronto, rather than in the House.

We know that our province, our cities and our towns need to address the infrastructure deficit, estimated at more than \$100 billion. An alarming 60% of what needs to be repaired or replaced is more than 50 years old.

New Democrats support the building of infrastructure in this province. When we heard that legislation was forthcoming, we had high hopes that the issues that had been raised by construction groups across the province would be addressed.

I was in Sudbury yesterday, meeting with the mayor and different community leaders up there about their infrastructure needs: roads, sewers, bridges, culverts, the Ring of Fire—you name it. The list goes on and on up there. They were hoping for some long-term sustainable infrastructure funding, but I haven't found that in there yet.

New Democrats welcome the provision for increased use of apprentices, but other than that, we really don't see a response to what the construction industry is telling us is a badly flawed model for building infrastructure. For example, at a time when foreign global companies are increasingly winning huge construction contracts, there are no requirements that I've seen yet spelled out for increased Ontario content. At a time when regular building inspections are being replaced by a hidden warranty system, there's no mention of remedying the safety problem.

Perhaps more bewildering, why mandate a 10-year plan for infrastructure when there is no legislative oversight of the plan, nor any sanctions built into the legislation if the government fails to follow through on the plan? We're a little bit skeptical on this side of the House. We're hoping for a good explanation from this government during second reading as to what this is all about.

I have to tell you, I had a little bit of a briefing earlier today on this. It was more like hide-and-seek, show-and-tell. I had a young staffer tell me—not showing me anything; he couldn't do that until the minister spoke—about paragraph 8 in section 3, and whether it would apply or not. I'm glad we've seen a little bit of this, but as far as transparency, I want to see a whole lot more.

NATIONAL HOUSING DAY

Ms. Cindy Forster: National Housing Day is an important reminder to all of us of the role that a safe and affordable place to live plays in eliminating the cycle of poverty. As Ontario's need for affordable housing grows, we need to ensure that we have a plan in place to provide adequate housing for people in this province.

When we look at the government's record on affordable housing, it's clear that they've failed to address this pressing need. It's been 10 years since they were elected, and we still see the waiting list hitting records that are really high: 158,000 households in this province are on the wait-list—in Niagara alone, 5,700, and in Toronto, a staggering 90,000 households.

1540

These numbers come at a time when the federal government has pledged to work with provincial governments in a fund-matching program, called the affordable housing program, that would have some impact in addressing this pressing need. However, it's been eight months, and the province and the feds still haven't been able to get a meeting together. At stake is \$253 million per year to be matched by the provinces or the territories, bringing the total to \$506 million per year over each of five years. Why isn't the government making it a priority to meet with their federal counterparts and to lock down this much-needed funding?

Our caucus recently met with the Campaign 2000 group, focused on eradicating poverty for our children here in the province. One of the recommendations was that we move forward with working with the Canadian

government on this program, because one in seven kids in this province is living in poverty, and they see it as a down payment towards a national housing strategy. It's necessary if we're going to kind of reduce that trend of cutting funding to affordable housing.

Unfortunately, we see here in the government of Ontario that the housing issue is not a priority. My colleagues and I have come forward with a number of pieces of legislation, like inclusionary zoning, a way for municipalities to make sure that new developments include a certain percentage of affordable housing. I also came forward with a bill in the last session for rent control on all rental buildings across this province. However, the government isn't acting on either of those, either.

I hope that National Housing Day reminds the government of this pressing issue of the need for more affordable housing in the province, and that it brings forward some legislation to put a plan in place.

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

PETITIONS

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. John O'Toole: This morning I asked a question on this very issue. It's a coincidence I have a petition on it as well.

"Whereas Hydro One Networks Inc. (Hydro One) is proposing construction of a new transformer station on a 100-acre site in Clarington, near the Oshawa-Clarington boundary"—and Mr. Speaker, this site is on the Oak Ridges moraine;

"Whereas concerns have been raised about the environmental impacts of this development, including harm to wildlife as well as contamination of ponds, streams and the underground water supply;

"Whereas sites zoned for industrial and/or commercial use are the best locations for large electricity transformer stations;

"Whereas most, if not all, residents do not agree this project is needed and that, if proven to be necessary, it could be best accommodated at alternative locations such as Cherrywood or Wesleyville;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, ask that the Ontario Legislature support the preservation of the Oak Ridges moraine, the greenbelt and the natural environment at this site. We also ask that the Ontario Legislature require the Clarington transformer station to be built at an alternative location zoned for an industrial facility and selected in accordance with the best planning principles."

I'm pleased to sign and support this, and present it to William, one of the pages in their last few days here.

MINIMUM WAGE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to present my very first petition 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 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 affix my signature to this petition and give it to page Cynthia to deliver to the table.

SMALL BUSINESS

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

"Whereas small businesses not only employ thousands of Ontarians with well-paying jobs, they also play a vital role strengthening Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas providing tax relief to small and local businesses strengthens the economy and creates a business climate that attracts investment and helps create jobs; and

"Whereas the government has taken several other initiatives to making Ontario the most attractive place to do business in North America;

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

"That the members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 105, Supporting Small Businesses Act, 2013, introduced on September 24, 2013, by the Ontario Minister of Finance."

I fully support the petition, Mr. Speaker, and I will give the petition to page Julia.

HYDRO RATES

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

"Whereas the Green Energy Act has driven up the cost of electricity in Ontario due to unrealistic subsidies for certain energy sources, including the world's highest subsidies for solar power; and

"Whereas this cost is passed on to ratepayers through the global adjustment, which can account for almost half of a ratepayer's hydro bill; and

“Whereas the high cost of energy is severely impacting the quality of life of Ontario’s residents, especially fixed-income seniors; and

“Whereas it is imperative to remedy Liberal mismanagement in the energy sector by implementing immediate reforms detailed in the Ontario PC white paper Paths to Prosperity—Affordable Energy;

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

“To immediately repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009, and all other statutes that artificially inflate the cost of electricity with the aim of bringing down electricity rates and abolishing expensive surcharges such as the global adjustment and debt retirement charges.”

I certainly agree with this petition and will be passing it off to page Payton.

WASTE REDUCTION

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: “Whereas protecting the environment should be everyone’s responsibility, including manufacturing and material producing companies; and

“Whereas it is important to require producers to be financially and environmentally responsible for recycling the goods and packaging they sell in Ontario, and to divert these wastes from landfill to recycling to drive innovation, generate new jobs, and new Ontario-made products; and

“Whereas new approaches are needed that reflect ideas and recommendations from the recycling sector that are designed to improve current recycling systems, to increase recycling and diversion rates, and better protect our environment;

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

“That members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 91, the Waste Reduction Act, 2013, introduced on June 6, 2013, by the Ontario Minister of Environment.”

I will sign this petition and give it to page Sarah.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Rick Nicholls: “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;

“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.”

I approve of this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to page Cynthia.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I’d like to present a petition. It reads:

“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 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 this petition. I will affix my name and hand it to page Jeffrey.

1550

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Grant Crack: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas there is an evident shortage of long-term-care beds in the region, all facilities have long waiting lists;

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

“Demand the establishment of a long-term-care facility within the urban area of the city of Clarence-Rockland.”

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Marina.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I have a petition here 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 affix my signature to it.

AIR QUALITY

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

“Whereas Ontario’s Drive Clean Program was implemented as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and vehicle emissions have declined significantly from 1998 to 2010; and

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

“Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and

“Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new, computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error;

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

“That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.”

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

WASTE REDUCTION

Mr. John Fraser: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas protecting the environment should be everyone’s responsibility, including manufacturing and material producing companies; and

“Whereas it is important to require producers to be financially and environmentally responsible for recycling the goods and packaging they sell in Ontario, and to divert these wastes from landfill to recycling to drive innovation, generate new jobs, and new Ontario-made products; and

“Whereas new approaches are needed that reflect ideas and recommendations from the recycling sector that are designed to improve current recycling systems, to increase recycling and diversion rates, and better protect our environment;

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

“That members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 91, the Waste Reduction Act, 2013, introduced on June 6, 2013, by the Ontario Minister of the Environment.”

I agree with this petition. I’m affixing my signature and handing it to page Payton.

DARLINGTON NUCLEAR GENERATING STATION

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the economic benefit of the retained nuclear scenario is \$60 billion. Eliminating the wind options in the long-term energy plan (LTEP) will have a positive economic benefit of \$21 billion. Forgoing the nuclear option in the LTEP will have an economic loss of \$38 billion;

“Whereas future economic growth of the Durham region heavily relies on the new build;

“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 limits employment opportunities of university graduates like those from UOIT;

“Whereas in addition to refurbishing the four existing reactors at Darlington 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 the provincial government confirms their commitment to the refurbishment of all four units at the Darlington generating station and that the Ontario government reinstates the original plan for the completion of two new reactors at the Darlington generating station.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this and present it to Arvind, one of the pages.

WASTE REDUCTION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ve got a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that reads as follows:

“Whereas protecting the environment should be everyone’s responsibility, including manufacturing and material producing companies; and

“Whereas it is important to require producers to be financially and environmentally responsible for recycling the goods and packaging they sell in Ontario, and to divert these wastes from landfill to recycling to drive innovation, generate new jobs, and new Ontario-made products; and

“Whereas new approaches are needed that reflect ideas and recommendations from the recycling sector that are designed to improve current recycling systems, to increase recycling and diversion rates, and better protect our environment;

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

“That members of the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 91, the Waste Reduction Act, 2013, introduced on June 6, 2013, by the Ontario Minister of Environment.”

Speaker, I agree with this, will sign it and send it down with Michaela.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STRONGER PROTECTION FOR ONTARIO CONSUMERS ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 RENFORÇANT LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR ONTARIEN

Ms. MacCharles moved third reading of the following bill:

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

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The minister has the floor.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: On April 18 of this year, I rose in the House to introduce legislation to protect and strengthen the rights of Ontario consumers in four key areas.

Before I go ahead with my remarks, Speaker, I would like to introduce someone who’s here in the gallery. Her name is Jessie Weel, and she’s one of the policy advisers from the Ministry of Consumer Services who worked very hard on Bill 55. Welcome. It’s nice to have you here this afternoon in the Legislature.

The Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013, would, if passed:

—strengthen consumer rights against aggressive, high-pressure door-to-door sales tactics for water heater rentals;

—create new standards of conduct for providers of debt settlement services and protect vulnerable consumers from misleading and unfair practices;

—provide safeguards to homebuyers by strengthening the integrity of real estate bidding practices by increasing transparency in multiple-offer situations; and

—finally, offer more power to home sellers to negotiate flexible, lower-cost arrangements when using a real estate professional’s services.

Overall, Speaker, our government is committed to helping Ontarians in their everyday lives by strengthening consumer protection and ensuring that Ontario’s marketplace is fair and transparent, and that consumer confidence is strong.

1600

I’m proud to rise again today in the House to begin third reading debate on this important piece of legislation. It aims to empower consumers by strengthening consumer rights, requiring suppliers to give consumers the information they need to make the best decisions for their needs and budgets, and helping us all remove the pressure we feel as consumers when making big-ticket purchases.

Bill 55, if passed, would have a widespread, positive impact on the day-to-day lives of millions of people in our province, Speaker. Whether you’re dealing with aggressive door-to-door sales tactics used by someone to sell you a water heater rental contract or you’re in need of help to settle debts or you’re buying or selling a home, this bill, if passed, will be a big win for consumers. It bears repeating that this bill, if passed, will provide more rights and more protection for consumers. This bill would also promote more openness and transparency, helping build consumer confidence when entering into deals in these sectors.

Let me first talk about the recent committee process, Speaker. Over the past five weeks, the bill was discussed by my honourable colleagues and members of the House in the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. Stakeholders and members of the public were also offered an opportunity to present their views and comment about the bill, and indeed they did so in large numbers. The committee heard from more than a dozen interested parties, who shared valuable insights and information about the bill. They discussed how Bill 55, if passed, would help consumers in Ontario be better informed in these areas. It would help these consumers know their rights and obligations when dealing with water heater rentals at their front door, when securing debt settlement services, or when buying or selling a house.

We also heard how we could improve on this proposed legislation, and that, of course, is indeed what a committee is for. We listened and the committee listened. As a result of the valuable feedback at committee, coupled with further input from my ministry—the Ministry of Consumer Services—and from stakeholders and the public over the past many months, the committee made a number of amendments to the draft Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013, to provide

further clarity and better protect the consumers of our province.

Those amendments clarify further that when a water heater supplier violates the no-installation rule within the 20-day cooling-off period, the consumer would be protected against a claim by the original supplier for all costs that the consumer incurs in connection with the installation of the water heater, including the removal or return of the original water heater. This is an important point because the new 20-day extended cooling-off period for door-to-door water heater rentals is a key feature of the bill. With this amendment, the consumer is even better protected.

Other amendments made at committee also ensure that consumers would receive the information they require to better understand their debt settlement service agreements and the effect those arrangements may have on their credit rating. These amendments mean that credit counsellors would have to disclose information to the consumer about how the organization is funded, with regulations to be considered to set out more details.

Further amendments made at committee mean that real estate professionals could have the option to retain copies of all written offers involved in a real estate transaction or other documents related to that offer, such as maintaining a summary document of all offers. This would increase flexibility and reduce administrative burden for our real estate professionals in this province.

These amendments not only help to meet our objective of stronger consumer protection but are also responsive to some industry concerns that were raised during the hearings.

While I realize that this was, indeed, a complicated, technical bill, I would like to thank all the committee members for their hard work and thoughtful consideration in improving this bill, and I also want to thank my ministry for their very hard work on this bill as well.

I understand that there were many more ideas at the table to further strengthen this bill, and I look forward to working with members, industries and others, if this passes, in the regulatory process.

Looking at our proposed bill, it does aim to safeguard and strengthen the consumer rights of the people of Ontario in the sectors of door-to-door sales, debt settlement services and real estate.

So far this year, the Ontario government has received more than 2,240 complaints and inquiries about water heater sales, including those made door to door. This issue has consistently ranked as one of the top 10 complaints my ministry has received over the past three years. Every week, we hear about how homeowners have been duped by aggressive sales tactics at their own door when dealing with water heater rentals, and we read about them all the time in the media.

Of course, we know that most water heater companies do not conduct themselves in this way—let's be clear about that. But we're talking about the few organizations within the industry that can be identified as bad actors in this marketplace and that bring a bad name, quite frankly, to all the other reputable businesses.

The high-pressure salespeople we are talking about today take aim at seniors and newcomers to our province, people who may be particularly vulnerable to misleading sales tactics, and who may have a hard time understanding the contracts they are being offered.

We've even heard about some salespersons falsely claiming to be representatives of other legitimate organizations, and who have gone so far as to claim that they are from the government. That's kind of a funny one, when they come to my door and claim they're from the government. Then I tell them what my job is; needless to say, they don't stay long at my doorstep.

Our Liberal government feels it's important to protect Ontario consumers from these abusive and unscrupulous door-to-door sales tactics. The people of this province themselves also want greater protection. A recent Angus Reid survey of Ontario homeowners found that 57% felt pressured into making a purchase or signing a contract for goods or services when approached at the door, and 35% of those Ontarians who made a purchase say they ended up regretting that they had done so.

Bill 55 proposes to increase protection to Ontario consumers by doing a number of things, Speaker. First, it doubles the existing 10-day cooling-off period to 20 days for water heaters, providing consumers with more time to consider their decision. This is a very key feature of our bill. Secondly, it bans delivery and installation of water heaters during that new 20-day cooling-off period. Finally, it allows rules requiring companies to confirm their sales by making scripted and recorded telephone calls to customers within that 20-day cooling-off period.

As I mentioned earlier, an amendment brought forward in committee and supported by members would provide new consumer rights when the rules are not followed, such as requiring the original supplier to pay all costs and cancellation fees that a consumer incurs when the 20-day cooling-off period is not observed. This would mean that a consumer is protected, for example, against all costs they incur from suppliers for the removal or return of goods. This also means that a consumer could simply cancel a contract within 20 days if they have concerns, or if they change their mind, before the water heater is even installed. Consumers would not need to feel that they have been coerced or pressured into a new rental.

It's worth noting that all disclosures that would be required under the bill would need to be made in clear, easy-to-understand language, which is actually already required by the Consumer Protection Act of Ontario.

Looking at debt settlement services, we are aware that some companies that provide this service offer to dramatically reduce a person's debt. They promise to do so by negotiating with a person's creditors—provided the consumer, of course, pays upfront fees. Some companies offering debt settlement services charge high, upfront administrative fees and may not deliver on their promised services. For some consumers in financial difficulty, this situation can force them into even more debt. It can be devastating for consumers who are already in a difficult

situation. Some companies may also hide contract clauses that reduce or eliminate the value of the original services offered.

To protect consumers against the misleading practices of some debt settlement services, Bill 55 proposes to prohibit the payment of upfront fees before those services are provided, and to limit the amount of fees charged overall. We will be working with the industry to set these limits by regulation.

1610

Contracts would need to be clear and easy to understand. As well, an amendment was added at committee and supported by members that would require consumers receive the information they need, which is a clear and detailed explanation to understand the effect of debt settlement agreements and what those impacts may have on their credit rating.

Bill 55 would also allow consumers to cancel their contract, without having to state a reason, within 10 days after receiving a copy of the agreement. Our government is implementing a cooling-off period to an industry that did not have one in Ontario prior to Bill 55. This would give consumers more time for second thought before committing thousands of dollars to this possibly risky solution.

Misleading sales practices and advertising related to debt settlement services would also be prohibited under this bill. We've all seen and heard ads on TV and radio saying they can cut your debt by 50%, 60% or 70%. "Pay only pennies on the dollar," they say. If those claims are really true, then companies, of course, will be allowed to make them.

Finally, our new legislation, if passed, would require credit counsellors to disclose information to consumers about the funding their organizations receive.

If companies that offer debt settlement services fail to follow these rules, our new legislation, if passed, would enable their mandatory licences to be revoked, meaning they cannot legally conduct business in Ontario.

Now, to talk about the last key area of the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, and that's the real estate sector. Ontario's real estate professionals, I think we can all agree, are among the best, and we have confidence in the effective role that the Real Estate Council of Ontario plays in regulating this sector.

Homebuyers rely on information about bids that come from the real estate professionals themselves, particularly in multiple offer situations. That means that these buyers need to be sure about the true nature of the offers that are coming in or, indeed, if an offer has really come in at all. This makes the competitive nature of bidding on a home all the more stressful, as anyone who's ever been part of it can attest. Adding to the pressure is the fact that for most of us, a home is easily the most expensive thing we will ever purchase.

Bill 55 proposes a solution to this problem of transparency. It would require real estate persons and brokers acting on behalf of a buyer to only present offers that are in writing. Salespeople and brokers would also be pro-

hibited from suggesting or claiming that a written offer exists, if that is false.

Bill 55 would also allow any person who's made a written offer to purchase a particular home to ask the registrar of the Real Estate Council of Ontario to work with their seller's brokerage to determine the number of written offers that were received and to report that number.

Real estate professionals would be required to retain a copy of the summary of all written offers involved in a real estate transaction. To increase flexibility and reduce the administrative burden for real estate professionals, a new amendment would allow for an option to keep other documents related to an offer: for example, a summary document of all written offers or all the offers themselves.

It's important to state that falsifying information or documents related to real estate is already an offence under the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002. The proposed reforms would enhance the Real Estate Council of Ontario's ability to inquire into all claims of false offers, making it easier to understand and to take action when needed.

We have worked with the Ontario Real Estate Association in putting forward this change. Our Liberal government is committed to balancing industry concerns with consumer protection wherever possible.

In summary, the bill would, if passed, maintain public confidence in real estate transactions when multiple bids on the same property are involved.

As well, Bill 55 would, if passed, give homebuyers and sellers more power to negotiate lower-cost services by removing the ban on charging both fees and commissions. By allowing real estate agents to customize their fees and commissions based on the services that the consumer really wants, rather than paying for a full package of services, the market would be better served. Consumers would have greater flexibility in how they spend their money, by tailoring the costs with the services they want.

These options also have the potential to unleash innovation and creativity in the sector. We are certainly seeing other sectors going in the same direction, where consumers have the right to pick and choose the services or goods that they want to buy. This change will make Ontario's real estate marketplace consistent with all other provinces in Canada, while responding to recommendations from the Competition Bureau.

In conclusion, we believe that Bill 55 will indeed build on the steps our government continues to take to strengthen consumer protection for the people of Ontario. The government has a responsibility to Ontario consumers and their families to ensure that consumers understand their rights and businesses understand their responsibilities. Bill 55 is designed to make our marketplace fair, safe and one where all people in this province can shop with confidence. If passed, Bill 55 will help Ontario consumers be informed when purchasing big-ticket items and feel confident about the choices they've made. All of

these measures would strengthen consumer protection and help people in their everyday lives. This promotes a fair and transparent marketplace, where Ontario families and individuals can make informed choices, spend wisely and protect their hard-earned money.

I call on this House, Speaker, to support the bill so that Ontario residents can get the protection they want and deserve.

Again, I want to thank my honourable colleagues on the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly for their thoughtful consideration in improving this bill and the work of my ministry; it is stronger for it.

In the end, we want to help Ontario families and individuals—all consumers—to be comfortable and confident when they're buying goods and services in this province, including when they are dealing with water heater rental decisions, when buying or selling their homes or using debt settlement service companies. We want to help people in this province to make informed choices, to spend wisely and protect their hard-earned money. Those confident consumers will ultimately help strengthen the economy of this great province.

We have a plan to increase consumer protection, and our plan is working.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I am pleased to rise and offer my comments on Bill 55 as it comes before us at third reading.

I will begin by reminding this House that the PC caucus has always been at the forefront of consumer protection, and the current framework for consumers to know and exercise their rights was laid out by our leader, Tim Hudak, during his tenure as minister of consumer services.

Over the years, the consumer market in Ontario has evolved to include new products, such as new kinds of agreements and, obviously, new challenges.

The one truly efficient means of ensuring consumers do not fall for high-pressure sales tactics, of course, is a comprehensive consumer education effort.

Back in 2009, the Ontario Auditor General highlighted how the Ontario Ministry of Consumer Services was not doing enough to make Ontarians aware of their consumer rights and the means they had to resolve complaints.

Let us be absolutely clear: No amount of legislation and regulation will eliminate all the bad players from the market. Those who contravene the spirit of the law today are likely to contravene the letter of the law tomorrow. You cannot legislate an honest market into existence; you can only help create the conditions for it to develop.

The ministry continues to rely on consumers being proactive and reading through its website. Although informed consumers should do so, it is still the ministry's duty to get the message out, and they aren't doing it.

So here we come to Bill 55. During the second reading debate, we remarked that, as written, schedule 1 did nothing to stop collection calls once a consumer hired a debt settlement agency. Being in debt, especially when

those debts turn bad, is a stressful situation for consumers, and we would have liked to see a provision that would have reduced that stress, but the government stubbornly refused.

Many debt settlement companies operate cleanly and transparently with regular Ontario licences and codes and good practices. However, unscrupulous fly-by-night operators can base their operations and accounts outside of Ontario, including using foreign call centres. Without a truly informed consumer marketplace, an Ontario consumer might not know the difference. In this optic, the government's approach and sound bites have had the unintended consequence of lulling the consumer into a false sense of safety.

1620

The market for debt settlement services needs to be transparent and honest. Compared to many other options, such as bankruptcy, debt settlement is a finer tool with which to rebuild one's life. However, because of the nature of the business, the same legal framework and protections for bankruptcy do not apply to debt settlers. This is, of course, a concern that remains unaddressed.

The top complaint for the Ministry of Consumer Services is collection agencies, independent businesses that usually buy debt from other credit holders at a fraction of the cost and then chase the consumer for payment. Alternatively, they can collect a fee from the creditor once the debt begins getting repaid.

Speaker, the first thing a consumer-first government would do is get the collectors off the consumer's back once they have resorted to a settlement. Unfortunately, this isn't in Bill 55.

We filed an amendment to make this happen, and the government refused. In Bill 55, the charging of any fee before a settlement is reached is banned. This is a simplistic and superficial provision. The unintended result will be to drive the debt settlement industry out of business.

Bill 55 gives the creditors unlimited power over the consumer and the settler. As long as they can hold tight, refuse all settlement offers and continue to pester the consumer, they will starve the debt settlement industry of funds and force them out of business. Sadly, this is a common theme of this government.

The government placed a provision that allows them to issue regulations describing what can and cannot be charged upfront. We offered an amendment that would have clarified this and cast it in stone in the legislation: Charge only an initial fee, not proportional to the consumer's debt load, and a negotiation fee, neither of which can exceed a prescribed amount. The government refused.

We believe that no one should work for free, and the right to be compensated for your labours is not to be given by any government. People and businesses are born with it. Bill 55 flies in the face of that principle, and the Liberals refuse to correct the flaw.

Overall, schedule 1 is a baby step in the regulation of debt settlement services, but it does not reduce the stress,

nor can it protect against fly-by-night settlers. This can only be done by a consistent ministry effort to educate Ontario consumers.

Schedule 1 comes into force by proclamation, and before it is proclaimed, I hope the government will correct these mistakes.

Schedule 2 is designed to deal with a situation peculiar to Ontario. We are the only jurisdiction where most hot water heaters are rented from legacy providers rather than purchased outright. Water heater providers range from reputable and consumer-friendly to outright fraudsters. My constituents in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry often complain about persistent door-to-door salesmen, who often misrepresent themselves as TSSA or energy board employees, make safety judgments they are not allowed to issue, and coax consumers into contracts.

The current framework for consumer agreements recognizes three agreements. Direct agreements are entered into face-to-face, remote agreements are entered into by other means, such as by telephone or by mail, and Internet agreements are self-explanatory.

The government has taken a very restrictive view of the problem and in doing so has left a gaping loophole in the legislation. As it is written, the added consumer protections granted by schedule 2 will only apply to those agreements signed at the door. They will not apply to agreements entered into over the phone or by mail or over the Internet. Bad players who commit the criminal act of misrepresentation will not hesitate to use the power of mail, the phone or Internet marketing to target consumers.

The PC caucus offered an amendment that would have ratified the situation by making the added protection apply to all agreements related to the rental of hot water heaters, nipping the bad phone and Internet telemarketers in the bud. The government refused to examine it, and by a procedural quirk, one man's "no" was enough to deny the amendment from any chance of being heard, let alone discussed.

The PC caucus offered amendments to place consumer guarantees into legislation. We offered to codify the mandatory verification call, added protection against wrongful billing, all-in pricing to ensure consumers know what they will be paying per month and clearer remedies against bad players. The government refused them.

The PC caucus offered an added solution to reduce aggressive customer retention. Under current arrangements, a new supplier will take the existing hot water tank out and substitute their own. Regardless of the tank's age, the old tank is now garbage and a significant loss to the previous supplier. Because of this risk, customer retention in the industry can be truly cutthroat. We offered to place a buyout and depreciation clause similar to the one codified in the wireless bill, Bill 60. Consumers would have been spared a lot of stress when changing suppliers, but the government dug in their heels.

In six months' time, we'll be back to square one, with the bad players pestering consumers over the phone, and

consumers will be inundated with mail, some of it misleading. Consumers who were vulnerable to high-pressure tactics will still be targeted. The government will need to take action again, earning itself some more media in the process.

Speaker, there is a better way to address these concerns, but unfortunately the government refused to entertain our amendments that would have fixed the shortcomings. All in all, schedule 2, as it is, is severely undercooked, and customers should send it back.

Schedule 3 removes a restriction for real estate brokers to charge a combination fee and commission. Ontario is the last province to have this restriction, and we're glad to see it gone.

The part of the schedule 3 dealing with phantom offers causes some concerns, and only one of them was addressed. The remaining concern centres around a consumer's ability to call a dishonest broker's bluff when the broker pressures a consumer into making a binding legal offer to buy a property by claiming there are other offers on the house. As it is written today, schedule 3 implies that you have to first buy and ask questions later. I'm convinced that this is an oversight, and in the near future, we should see it corrected.

Speaker, the government was very stubborn in committee, rejecting many offers to codify reasonable provisions to the legislation, counting on their own ability to make regulations. This is the same government that has, by regulation, destroyed merit-based hiring in schools and caused, in 2010, the largest mass arrests in modern Canadian history. Our skepticism about their regulation-making wisdom is more than justified.

To conclude, a deal is a deal, and considering that most of the provisions of this bill come in force by proclamation, we remain cautiously supportive of this bill, with the provision that many of its sections need to be corrected to avoid loopholes and unintended consequences.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It is my pleasure to join in the debate. First and foremost, I think that while it is a small step forward, we can still agree that it is a step forward in providing some protection for consumer services. Some of my remarks will echo what the member from the Conservative Party has said. He indicated that there were areas where we could have gone further but we didn't. We in the NDP had tried, on a number of occasions, to push this bill to cover more areas, areas that would have made sense to add in, but they were not supported.

However, I do want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the great work of all the staff members who were involved in the process of this bill. There was some great work put in. There were very interesting discussions in committee hearings, and there was some great input by legislative counsel as well as ministry counsel. I enjoyed all the discourse and the discussion that occurred. I think it was, in some regards, fruitful, and it did provide a better bill.

Beginning with the debt settlement services component of this bill, I think we need to look at our priorities. The complaints that I receive in my office with respect to this issue are not so much people complaining about debt settlement services. People complain about collection agencies. That's what people are really stressed out about. That's where the consumer is receiving call after call from aggressive people on the line. The pressure that they apply, the tactics that they use, are inappropriate. It's causing a great deal of concern amongst consumers and constituents.

1630

The collection agents are the ones who go after the consumer to get their debt. I agree: If this government was serious about protecting the consumer, the first step would be to make sure we put in some additional limitations on the way these collection agencies conduct themselves, the way that they operate, the manner in which they communicate with people, the type of language they use, the harassing behaviour that they exhibit. Those are areas that should be limited; those are areas that should be addressed; those are areas that should have been prioritized. That being said, that was not addressed in this bill.

What was addressed is debt settlement services. By and large, the concept here is, debt settlement services are hired. They are services that a consumer hires or makes use of in order to assist them when they're in a difficult position, paying back their debts. They are vulnerable people and, understandably, they need some assistance. They should be provided some protection, but if you look at the concept here, debt settlement services are pro-consumer by their nature. By their very nature, they're a service that's intended to protect the consumer.

By and large, there are a number of good operators, good actors, in this industry, and they have provided good services. They have assisted many people in settling their debts at a far lower amount than they would have otherwise had to pay. They have assisted them by taking some of the burden off their shoulders, and they've done a good job. There are certainly some bad actors as well, and those bad actors definitely need to be addressed. Their practices, their behaviour and their business models need to be looked at and need to be regulated in such a way that we protect our consumers. That's absolutely correct.

As a starting point, we have to look at the two and acknowledge that debt settlement services, by their nature, are protecting the consumer out there, assisting the consumer to settle their debts, whereas collection agents are trying to aggressively obtain payment for debt. The priorities are a concern for me.

With respect to the payment plan, I implore the government: You have an opportunity now to look at the way debt settlement services are being paid. Because there are some good actors, and if we acknowledge that some of these—many of these debt settlement services do provide a good service that consumers need. They need to be able to exist. They need to be able to be paid

for their work, and there needs to be a payment plan in place that allows a fair and reasonable fee to be charged that does not exploit the consumer but that does give debt settlement services the ability to provide their service and assist people who are in debt.

Before proclamation, I ask the government to at least consult with the debt settlement service providers, to obtain from them some strategies in order to allow them to still exist so they can still continue to operate in a good manner and a responsible manner. Make sure that they are given an opportunity to give some input with respect to how they can still be paid and still provide a service and provide that protection to consumers.

The second issue is that there were some great deputations that we heard at committee. One of them was from some trustees in bankruptcy. They provided a plan that would assist in providing a reasonable, fair mechanism so that debt settlement services could be paid. That model that they had suggested was something that flowed from the way trustees are being paid. That's a model that could be employed, and that's an idea that you should look at.

We don't want to head down the path that we've seen other jurisdictions head down, where laws were enacted provincially that basically got rid of the entire industry; the entire debt settlement service industry was eradicated from the province. We don't want those conditions to exist, because we have to acknowledge that they do provide a good service. We just need to get rid of the bad actors and the bad business models. That's my concern with respect to that component of the bill.

The second component of the bill spoke about water heaters. This was an area where there was certainly a great deal of consumer complaint, and I was quite impressed with the fact that this was an example of government policy being directed by consumer complaints.

We talk about the fact that there is a lack of participation in our society, that people don't feel that their voice matters. They don't get involved in politics. They don't even vote. Our voter turnout is at an all-time low. We're sometimes seeing, in many communities, less than 50% of people actually vote.

At a time when there's this great political apathy, I'm encouraged by the fact that this legislation and the water heater component was largely driven by consumer complaints. It's another model, or another method, by which the public has made their concerns heard. They voiced their concerns through complaining to the ministry, and the ministry has responded.

I applaud the citizens who have taken the time to complain about this issue, to raise their concern, because your voices have been heard, and it was a positive sign for democracy. It's an alternative way of making sure that the public is participating. There are other ways to participate beyond just voting, which is one of the most important ways, but this is also a mechanism that works. So I encourage consumers to complain more about other issues as well.

In this area with water heaters, one of the big problems that we saw is that we're addressing strictly direct

sales. If someone goes door to door, if they knock on someone's door and they engage in an improper sales tactic, they're aggressive, they dupe an unsuspecting consumer, they take advantage of, perhaps, elderly consumers or people who are new Canadians who don't have the same faculties with the language and there's a language barrier—that's an important area to address, and that was the substance of many complaints: that there were aggressive tactics. They were improper. Often people would say that someone would come to the door and claim that they were working for the ministry or that they were a part of a government agency. So these are serious concerns.

But that's not the only way that people can be duped. By only addressing direct sales, there is a loophole that's left open. It's not necessarily a gaping loophole, because the way that direct sales are defined is that at any point in time, even if the sale is commenced over the phone, if you complete that sale in person, it's still considered a direct sale, so it does provide a great deal of protection; I agree. But there are still times, there are still opportunities, that people might employ a strictly telephone sale, some other form of remote agreement, or also the Internet, and those areas were not covered by this bill.

We could have easily expanded the scope of the bill to say, "Listen, the tactics that we don't think are appropriate face-to-face, door-to-door: Those same tactics aren't appropriate over the phone. Those tactics are not appropriate over the Internet," albeit there's a significant difference between the door-to-door contact, the face-to-face contact, the ability to intimidate or to dupe or to confuse, obfuscate, when you meet someone face to face. Still, this is an opportunity that we can address something that if we address it now, we don't have to do that in the future. As we've seen before, wherever there is an opportunity for the bad actors to engage in improper sales techniques or improper and aggressive sales tactics, those actors might transition into those areas. Instead of making a change and then leaving a potential opening for a future transgression or future problem, why not address it now?

The NDP offered amendments to expand the scope of this bill to say, "Listen, let's just apply this good principle of making sure the people are held up to a certain standard, that there's a certain requirement of conduct when it comes to these types of sales for water heaters—let's expand that to include other types of agreements." That was not supported by the Liberals, and I think it should have been. It would have made this bill stronger, and it would have anticipated potential problems in the future.

One of the things that we saw in general at the committee hearing stage was that good ideas that are very relevant to the issue at hand were not able to be addressed. I raise this issue because, when we're looking at a problem, if there are some good ideas that are being brought up, it only makes sense that we implement them now. If there's an acknowledgement that it's a good idea but there's not the willingness to act on it, it simply is

doing a disservice to our society; it's doing a disservice to our communities.

I noticed that time and time again: that there was an issue that was flagged that was raised by the NDP or even by the Conservatives. It was acknowledged as being a good idea, but there wasn't the action. I have to raise my concern on that: that the Liberals could have taken more initiative with good ideas that could have broadened the bill and protected consumers to a greater degree.

1640

In addition to the water heater component of this bill, there is a certain concern with the long-term implications of decisions we make now. On one side, we need to ensure that we protect consumers to the greatest degree that we are able to. We also have to acknowledge that a competitive environment also protects consumers. By allowing for a competitive environment to exist within a given market, we allow for the choice for a consumer to drive the market. When we don't have choice as a consumer or if there is not competition, it limits choice and, at the end, the consumer is not being afforded the best protection.

For example, there were a number of issues raised by some of the new entrants to the market. Yes, some of the practices that they engaged in were improper, but the new entrants to this water heater market also drove down some of the prices. They also offered better services in some circumstances. We need to make sure that the laws that we implement protect consumers but also protect them not only for today—to ensure that they have the proper direct sales tactics, direct sales behaviour, that there aren't these duplicitous tactics being used. We also have to make sure that in the long run the consumer is benefited by a competitive market where the prices are kept lower so that they can enjoy the savings. My concern is that some of the decisions made by this government limited the ability for some of the new entrants to compete, and I'm hoping that in some of the ministerial regulations we can address those concerns by making sure there's a balance struck in that area.

Looking at the third component of this bill—the first component that I addressed was debt settlement services, the second point being the water heater—the third component was real estate, and in that regard, I think that we were able to come up with some strong amendments that made the bill something that would certainly protect consumers but also something that recognizes the realities of the real estate industry. I think that we've come up with a solution that is effective and appropriate.

The issue has come up a number of times. It has come up not only in Toronto—it's come up across the province—but particularly in the GTA, where there was this perception for either the buyer or the seller that there were multiple offers on the table. That perception was sometimes false or sometimes misleading, and what it did was it drove up the cost. There were complaints issued, and again, this was a complaint-driven piece of legislation—I applaud the work of everyday folks coming

forward with their issues and their concerns—but the problem was that if there are these phantom offers, if there is no evidence of an offer, sometimes what happened was that the prices were raised. They were raised and inflated in an unfair way, and sometimes that would pull on the emotions of the buyer, and they would end up offering something that was perhaps outside of their budget or sometimes a price that wasn't reflective of the fair market value.

What was proposed was that there should be a tracking of the offers, and the amendment we put in place, which was the great work of the real estate association, was that in requiring real estate agents to keep offers, there is a bit of a problem when—if you're hiring your own particular broker, there is a certain fiduciary duty that exists and that protects the consumer, but if you're required to keep an offer and you are not bound by that fiduciary duty—you don't have a duty, you're not hired by that real estate agent—then they're keeping sensitive information that could be used in an inappropriate way down in the future.

The amendment we put in place, which was a strong amendment, allowed the brokerage to keep other documents, such as a list or a record of the other offers on file, and also allowing the registrar to follow up, to make sure that if I'm buying a house and I want to know if there are alternative offers on the table, I can actually contact the registrar, or you can contact the registrar as a consumer and ensure that there are indeed other confirmed offers. That was a strong amendment, and I'm happy to see that was passed through.

One of the areas of contention that came up—and there was a number of deputations to this effect—was the cooling-off period, and I want to highlight this concern because there's an opening here. There's a potential area for abuse, and so I want to make sure that the government is aware of this area and takes the steps to make sure that this potential gap is closed.

All consumer advocate groups have made it clear that a cooling-off period is important. It's something that protects the consumers, so we supported the cooling-off period. What that means is, basically, if you agree to enter into a new agreement, there should be a period of time where there is no installation; no one comes into your home and starts putting in a new water heater. You have 20 days to think it through. That's an appropriate thing because when you make a decision like this, you want to think on it. You might have felt a little bit of pressure, but this adds an extra layer of protection. You agreed to enter into the agreement, but you're given 20 days to say, "You know what? I thought it through. I looked at my bills. It actually doesn't make any sense, so I'm not going to do it."

But there's an exception in the case of an emergency. Now, while it makes sense—we don't want to have people left out literally in the cold when there is an emergency that their water heater no longer works. But the way the law is defined right now, it's not clear what it means to say there's an emergency situation.

So, what if your water heater is not functioning at its full efficiency? It's functioning at 50%. Now to some people, a 50% functioning water heater might be an emergency. It might be a big problem. You don't have the hot water you need. But without clearly defining that, we leave an opening that someone could say, "Well, it was functioning at 10% or 20% less." That's a big problem because it's going to increase the cost to the household. If you're on a fixed income, that might be a serious problem. So that leaves an opening, and we have to make sure that there's a reasonable definition applied, that it works in a way that protects the consumer and doesn't allow for any future abuse of this exemption that would, again, create a hole in the protection that we're trying to establish for consumers.

That's an area that I ask the government to be cognizant of. I know that the ministry counsel is aware of this issue, but again I ask you to make sure you look carefully, that we don't create this exemption that leaves a big hole and undoes some of the work that we are trying to establish here.

Now, with respect to some of the priorities, while I think consumer protection is absolutely important, one of the things that we've asked for a number of times on behalf of the NDP is that while consumers are complaining and they're using the ministry to voice their concerns—that's a good thing. The problem is that the next step, if you complain but you want an advocate to actually work on your behalf, if you want to take up an issue and challenge a particular supplier, a particular industry, a particular provider of a service—now as a consumer, you can complain. That's one thing. But where is the advocacy on your behalf? Where is the individual who can advocate or the association that can advocate to fight for your concern?

We've seen in this province the Ombudsman of Ontario doing wonderful work in not only receiving complaints but also advocating, also championing issues that matter. Why not, in the consumer services field, a consumer service Ombudsman, an Ombudsman dedicated to consumer services that can assist in championing or advocating for the consumer? That's something we've asked for. That's something that would be a strong step forward in providing real protection for consumers, and I ask the government to consider that again.

We're looking at a bill that's going to provide some protection; I would say incremental and minimal protection, but certainly protection. But if we had a consumer Ombudsman who would advocate and receive complaints, that would be a significant step forward. That would be a bold step forward. That would be a strong step forward in consumer protection, and it's something that I implore the government to consider now that we're looking at a piece of legislation around consumer protection.

The other issue that I'm particularly concerned about is, again, while I think these are areas of concern and people had raised these concerns—and I'm happy that we're addressing particularly the water heater issue that's

been brought up a number of times—there are other issues that are quite important, and I'm concerned about this government's lack of priorities when it comes to issues of serious concern.

One of the issues that's come up—and one of the things about this issue is that the solution is of no cost to this government. It's Bill 83, the anti-SLAPP legislation. The government has introduced this bill and has only called it forward—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Twice.

1650

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I hear twice. Yes, that's right: twice. Thank you very much for the assistance, to my colleague to the right, literally to the right. The first time was June 4, 2013. The second reading was September 25, 2013.

So this bill was called forward only twice. It's a serious issue. At the foundation of our jobs here, we are supposed to be an institution of democracy. We're supposed to encourage democracy. One of the pillars of democracy is dissent, the right to get up and say, "I don't agree with what's going on. I don't agree with the government. I don't agree with the way my community is being developed." That is a fundamental hallmark of our society, and we need to protect that, cherish that, uphold that, ensure that it's given the respect it deserves, this right. The anti-SLAPP legislation was a step forward. We support this principle that if an individual in the community wanted to raise their concerns, wanted to highlight a problem, they wouldn't suffer a lawsuit that was only driven by a principle of silencing that individual; they wouldn't suffer the threat or the actual cost of a lawsuit that, at the end of the day, once it was settled in court, was shown to only have been commenced to deter an individual from participating in discourse, in democracy.

That type of legislation would not cost the government anything. There are certain areas in that legislation that we need to tighten to ensure that the language is clear and that we don't solve a problem with a sledgehammer when a scalpel would be more effective, but the principle of protecting public participation is fundamental and essential. It should be given a priority, but it hasn't been. So I question again the government's priorities when this bill has only been called twice after its first reading. I ask the government again to prioritize this bill to make sure it's given the priority it deserves. I notice that the Attorney General had an opportunity to present this bill and spoke in favour of it. Of course: It's a government bill—but not only speaking in favour; let's make sure it's a priority. Let's make sure that it's put forward in a way that it actually can be implemented into law. I'm hoping that my comments have not fallen on deaf ears.

One of the other areas that I touched on briefly was the concern with amendments being brought up, good ideas being brought forward, and then not being passed. I know that the Conservative critic also raised the issue that we put forward a number of motions, good motions that would have protected consumers and enhanced this bill, but they were all voted down.

We'll go over the three areas, starting with debt settlement services. One of the big areas that would have really protected consumers is that while we're regulating debt settlement services for the first time—they're being included in the collection services act. That's a good step. We need to regulate all industries that provide sensitive services, and the government has a responsibility to do so. But one area that came up that was quite important for the consumer is if you hire a debt settlement service and they provide a proper agreement, they have a proper payment plan in place, everything is done in a transparent and comprehensible manner and it's something that is fair to the consumer—if they do that, the debt settlement service should be able to provide at least the ability to buffer the consumer from collection agents. Many people have complained to me that they can't handle the harassing calls. They can't handle the pressure and the feeling of guilt that comes up when someone calls them on the phone and belittles them for not having paid back a debt. Obviously, people who are in these situations are facing some troubles and some struggles. The fact that we put forward an amendment that would have allowed the debt settlement service, once they were properly hired, once there was an agreement in place, to act as a barrier so the collection agent would have to go through the debt settlement service—that would have protected consumers. I know many people who have come to me, complaining about collection agencies, would have said, "That would have helped me. That would have given me that peace of mind, knowing that I wouldn't get those harassing calls." That's an area that was not accepted by the government, and I want to raise that again.

When we were looking at debt settlement services, another area that came up was the involvement of paralegals. The paralegals came forward with a deputation indicating that although they're licensees of the Law Society of Upper Canada and they've now been successfully incorporated into regulation by the law society, they are not entitled to—when it comes to collection agencies, their role and their duties are not formalized. It's a direction that the law society is headed in, but right now the legislation doesn't allow for it. We could have included it when we put forward an amendment that would have allowed for any licensee of the law society to be able to act in those circumstances, and it would have been a great step forward for allowing better access to justice, but again, this notion was voted down.

There were a number of areas that were proposed and voted down, and I just want to go through a couple of them. The biggest concern with the water heaters, the second component, was expanding its scope. We were in a good position to expand this protection; for example, the verification call. The independent verification call is a sound idea. If I'm going to buy something from a particular salesperson, to ensure that there isn't any sort of pressure tactic that makes me sign something without knowing what I'm getting into, an independent call makes sense. An independent call comes through and says, "We want to confirm the identity of the salesperson

and confirm various components to make sure that this is a fair and appropriate agreement that you're getting into." That person who is making the call is not getting a commission for how many people they can convince to enter into these agreements. They're just confirming the details. That is a good process and a good tactic for direct sales. Well, why not have an independent verification call for any sort of telephone sales? If there's an agreement that's struck over the phone and someone calls in and follows the procedure and maybe is a bit aggressive, and they make an agreement over the phone, why not have an independent phone call to verify that as well? What's the difference, really, between an agreement at the door and an agreement over the phone, when it comes to protecting the consumer? This is an area where we had put forward an amendment saying, "Let's expand this protection to apply to remote agreements as well. Telephone agreements should also have the same level of protection." Again, this amendment was voted down.

So there were a number of areas where we could have improved this bill but we didn't, and it was because the government didn't take the initiative, the opportunity to expand the protection that it could have afforded to consumers.

What we're left with now is a bill that does, in conclusion, provide an added level of protection. It does increase the protection when it comes to debt settlement services, when it comes to water heater rental agreements and when it comes to real estate transactions.

However, I want to make this point very clear. In certain areas, we're not sure about the impact or the consequences of our actions. We're not sure about what the greater implications of a piece of legislation are going to be. In those circumstances, I can see why we want to make an incremental increase, a small step forward, and then analyze the impact of that legislation and analyze the consequences that flow from that decision. But when it comes to something like consumer protection, we can take stronger steps, particularly when we know that similar steps have been taken in other areas.

1700

I want to draw a comparison. When we're speaking of the regulations that occurred for energy agreements, we took many steps there, but we haven't taken those steps in all the other industries that are related to energy. So while our electricity protections are guaranteed to consumers, and that area of consumer protection is strong, and we've taken a small incremental step forward for water heaters, why not expand that to other areas of gas, other areas of consumer services related to water heaters, related to hydro? We're taking small steps here when we can take stronger steps.

The overall problem that we had, as the NDP, was that there were areas where we could have expanded this bill. This bill didn't have to just deal with water heaters. It could have dealt with a broader type of consumer protection that went beyond just a narrow area that was much needed, but still too narrow. In areas where we've already taken the steps to protect consumers, we can

expand those protections broader than what we've done. I think that we're doing a disservice when we don't take strong steps in areas where there are minimal consequences, where we've seen the impact of it. We've seen the protections given in the energy file. We can implement those same policies that have worked, that have shown no negative consequences. We can implement those across the board.

So, again, I ask this government to consider the lack of seizing the moment. When we have an opportunity to make our laws stronger and better, we need to make sure that they're fulsome, that they cover all the areas where consumers need protection.

Finally, I want to just drive home this last point with the priorities of the government, that the three areas that were chosen: the water heater, the real estate and the debt settlement—again, I want to question the priority of the consumer. If the government was really serious about prioritizing the government, there were many other areas that we could have addressed, and particularly with the debt settlement services. The lack of any sort of consumer protection on the collection agent side shows a lack, I think, of prioritizing the concerns of the consumer, that if we are on one side regulating the debt settlement services, but on the other side aren't providing that same level of protection or enhanced level of protection with collection agencies, to the consumer it doesn't seem like the government's serious about protecting them, because their number one concern, when it comes to anything related to debt, is the collection agents, not the settlement services. Again, I question the government's priority when it comes to that issue, and I want the government to rethink their priorities when it comes to really protecting consumer services.

In a final plug, I want to make sure that moving forward—we'll support this bill. This bill will pass third reading; at least it will receive the support of the NDP. It's going to protect consumers, so I applaud the great work that was put into this bill. But moving forward now, we have an opportunity to introduce some other bills. We have a limited time. There is naturally going to be the winter break coming up. Again, I ask the government, let's prioritize some bills. Let's get through the anti-SLAPP legislation that will protect democracy in our communities. Let's make sure we use the time here wisely and allocate the time necessary to make sure that the bills that will protect the foundation of our society are passed through.

I question the government's real intentions regarding Bill 83. If the government wanted to pass this bill, they could have. If they wanted to bring this bill forward in an efficient manner, they could. So I implore the government to do so, because it's something important. Moving forward, I want the government to look at the priorities of this province and make sure the bills brought forward reflect those priorities, reflect the concerns of the province.

Thank you so much for the time, and I look forward to hearing more debate.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I appreciate the opportunity to address Bill 55. We know it was introduced, actually, in the last session here at Queen's Park. It's called the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. It's been through, oh, gosh, three or four—maybe four—days of committee hearings. Deputations were made. Amendments were bandied about and voted upon, and perhaps there is room for more change down the road, through regulation.

So here we are on third reading debate now. It's a bill, as we know, that was designed to end the tactic of high-pressure sales in three areas: water heater rentals, debt consolidation and real estate.

Now, with respect to real estate and real estate sales, for the last 10 years anyway, people have been waiting for legislation, measures to better protect them from those few unscrupulous real estate agents who use the practice of phantom offers as a sales tactic. Phantom bids are jiggled by a very few ethically challenged agents. There's no certainty of the nature of the offers coming in. When buying a house, ideally both the buyers and the sellers would have access to accurate information, but these kinds of pressure tactics distort the market, and the goal is to jack up the price. Inflated prices mean bigger mortgages, more household debt, higher default rates in some cases, and ultimately, it diminishes trust in our real estate industry, especially when someone has bought a house and then they find out later they've been scammed by an inflated-price phantom offer.

Buying a home is expensive enough as it is. It's stressful. It's usually the largest purchase that anyone would make. You're negotiating a mortgage. There's the fear of losing the house that you wish to purchase, concerns about what to do with the house you already own, if you do own a house, commissions—what the commissions are, and we feel there could be some more flexibility there—location. It all weighs heavily on people's minds when they've made that decision to move, and the last thing they need is an agent trying to increase their commission fraudulently by artificially upping the price, by talking about offers that don't exist or offers that are exaggerated above the actual offer or several offers that may be out there on the same house.

OREA, the Ontario Real Estate Association, suggested that Bill 55 propose amendments for REBBA, the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, to address the issue of phantom offers, phantom offers that have been fabricated by the listing sales rep to encourage potential buyers to rush their decision or increase the size of their offer. Very clearly, it's unethical, it's unprofessional, and OREA made it very clear in their presentation to committee that they strongly condemn this approach to business. I commend OREA for their strong condemnation of this phantom offer business. It's unethical; it's unprofessional.

I think of so many young people trying to buy a house, to get a mortgage, to get insurance. Often they've got to

buy new carpets, paint, water heaters—they've got to deal with a water heater rental contract—and just about everything else, and to be presented with inaccurate information—they end up buying something that turns out it wasn't worth that in the first place. So, to tackle phantom offers, it should clearly be established upfront, in an offer document. There should be a clear paper trail outlining the existence of any other offers. This would also help prevent any accusations of a consumer making false claims should there be a complaint sent in to the real estate council.

Further, Bill 55 will mandate that offers for a property be made in writing so that consumers can inquire with the real estate council as to whether other offers were made on that same property.

Mechanisms—this was discussed in committee—have to be in place to streamline this process, to simplify any additional paper burden. It could simply be a list of the offers or a cover sheet, if you will, to eliminate the unnecessary threat of red tape. Our interest is to provide real change, real protection from bogus phantom offers, not more paperwork. As the opposition, we continue to fight for an open, trustworthy consumer marketplace, a competitive marketplace. In fact, it was Tim Hudak who tabled the Consumer Protection Act back in 2002.

1710

The second issue covered by this legislation is water heaters. It's the number two complaint received by the ministry, and I can attest: My constituency office receives many such complaints as well. Constituents articulate their frustration at being bounced from one client service rep to another without any real resolution. I think of seniors. I think of other hard-working families trying to squeeze the budget, dealing with high electricity costs, for example. They find it upsetting when something that should be pretty straightforward is marred by questionable practices—and not only door-to-door sales, but also junk mail, telemarketing, things that oftentimes are designed to confuse the consumer.

One of my staff had an issue recently with a major player in the water heater rental industry. She discovered she was paying a lot more money than her neighbours for exactly the same water heater. We hear these complaints. How does this happen? Really, how does one know fact from fiction anymore without polling your neighbours, doing your own survey and trying to find out on your own?

There is deliberate deception. There's a hiding of costs. In some cases, there's the exploitation of customers' vulnerability, especially with the door-to-door sales.

We recognize Bill 55, if passed, would double the cooling-off period for water heater rentals. Suppliers would not be able to install new heaters for 20 days. We feel this should be extended to a number of other contracts as well, Speaker. Currently, once a new heater is installed, if there are consumer concerns with the price of the contract, cancellation charges can run up to several hundred dollars. Furthermore, suppliers can often charge for damages that may be small scratches on a 10-year-old heater.

Sadly, consumers can be taken advantage of in more ways than one. We recognize you can't legislate completely against deception or vulnerability, but you can strengthen the enforcement tools as well to ensure taxpayers have recourse beyond having to go to court.

Oftentimes, victims of these so-called scams are the people who can least afford a lawyer. When the rules are broken, recourse is often impossible. It's very slow. A claim by a consumer against a less-than-honest business can take months, even years. Again, there are the inevitable legal costs, stress, even health-related consequences.

Most importantly, this kind of business results in a decrease in consumer confidence. We're aware that there are many companies that provide superior products. They treat their customers with fairness and respect. However, times seem to change, and so do business practices. The Consumer Protection Act needs to evolve accordingly. Again, loss of confidence in business mirrors loss of confidence in the microeconomy, the general economy. We all know our economy needs all the help it can get right now.

The third leg of this three-legged legislation is problems relating to debt consolidation. To put this topic in perspective, in 2012, there were over 47,000 filings in Ontario for personal bankruptcy or consumer proposals—47,000, Speaker. Clearly there's a large number of people in this province who are facing significant financial hardship. Again, government is there for a reason: to help better protect people in some of these circumstances.

After meeting with representatives and hearing committee testimony as well from the Ontario Association of Insolvency and Restructuring Professionals, OAIRP, it was brought to my attention—they used the example of a client of theirs who obviously needed some friendlier alternatives to the more formal restructuring options that this person got involved in. He owed \$54,000. He signed company documents and didn't really understand what he was signing. He began making monthly payments of \$1,350. He was told to stop all other payments and ignore the collection calls. So he made three monthly payments—over \$4,000—then his wages got garnished. It seems the debt settlement company had not yet contacted this client's creditors. The client learned the company's policy was to not contact creditors until they collected a large sum of money. So he abandoned this plan. At that time, he was out \$4,000, and no action was taken.

The debt insolvency professionals recommended: a reasonable upfront fee, maybe \$750 or \$1,000; a similar amount payable upon approval or refunded to the debtor if the settlement is not approved; a reasonable percentage of payments distributed to creditors; and fixing initial fees—again, make everything reasonable and manageable; encourage timely contact with the creditors; and discourage the collection of payments without accountability. So some very good ideas came forward from this group. They recommend that trust accounts be maintained by the credit counselling operators, the debt collection agencies—maintained in the province of On-

tario, to deal with some of the offshore, almost, call centre approaches that existed in this business.

So three issues—three very good bits of advice on all of these issues.

Speaker, I'll wrap it up here.

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

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Further debate? The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Point of order: Could we get a clarification from the Clerks' table as to what length of time there has to be between you calling for further debate and when it's no longer possible to have that further debate? Is that totally within your discretion?

Interjection.

Hon. John Gerretsen: Well, good discretion then, yes.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I can help the Attorney General out, although on matters of legalities like this, he should understand that perfectly. Generally speaking, the Speaker will say, "Further debate," wait for a response—"Further debate," and a third time, "Further debate," and at that time, if no one responds, then generally speaking, the debate has ended. If that's helpful to the Attorney General, I'm glad to be of that help.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd ask the member to speak to the matter being debated.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm just trying to help out the Attorney General. He had a question, and I'm here to help. I'm like the government, John; I'm here to help.

Laughter.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, he does laugh, and so does everyone else.

That's pretty much what we've got here in this bill: They're the government and they're here to help, or at least they'd like to tell you that.

I can tell you that we proposed a number of amendments to this bill, and none of them were accepted. Generally speaking, we've agreed to support this bill as part of the programming motion to allow the government to clear the decks, as we said, so that they could come out with a jobs plan, but we've heard nothing about a jobs plan for the people of Ontario.

There are a couple of things in here that I personally disagree with. For example, the 20-day cooling-off period, I think, is way too long. It's actually going to be an impediment to the consumer, not a help. If you have decided you don't want to proceed with that contract, I think you can realize that in the time of 10 days. But if you have to wait 20 days for the people to go ahead and actually install that water heater, it's actually a bigger problem for the consumer than if we'd left it at 10 days. But that's what happens when we get governments and

ministers who think they're going to be too helpful. They out-think themselves, is what they do.

1720

I want to get back to the jobs plan. I want to be cognizant of the time here, too, because I know there are other speakers who want to speak as well. The jobs plan—this is part of a programming motion, so I think I can, quite frankly, speak to that without interruption. It's part of a programming motion so that we can clear the decks, because what the Premier said she wanted was to get rid of some of these less significant pieces of legislation that are, in their own eyes, important, but are not changing the face of Ontario like a jobs plan would. We want to talk about a jobs plan, but we won't—I want to talk about one job that the Premier created. He created this nice cushy job for former MPP Monique Smith down in Washington. She is probably doing a good job for Washington in the United States, because our lack of a jobs plan in Canada and Ontario is actually driving more and more people—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Point of order.

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

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, may I suggest, kindly, that the member speak to the bill at hand?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I would remind the member to keep his remarks related to the bill being discussed.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Quite frankly, I'm sure that the number of jobs that have gone to the United States might make her look good in Washington, but it's not looking very good here. Every day, across this province, more and more people are losing their jobs. Just last week, Heinz—

Mr. Paul Miller: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Just a moment. The member from Hamilton East.

Mr. Paul Miller: With all due respect to the member of the official opposition, I must concur with the minister. We're talking about a bill to protect consumers. We're not talking about job losses. I think he's way off the mark here on that, and I'd like him to stick to the agenda.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'd remind the member to restrict his comments to the—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It must be something about my smiling face. I listened to the member from the NDP earlier go on for 40 minutes and ramble on about nothing, and no one interrupted him, but I guess they weren't paying attention. I'm actually trying to draw attention to the things that matter here in the province of Ontario and why, even though we supported this bill in a programming motion, it was partly because there was a commitment on the part of this Premier and this government to move post-haste with a jobs plan in the province of Ontario. They are failing to do so. They continue to deny that there's a problem. She talks about—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): I'm going to remind the member that he must keep his remarks related to the bill at hand.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm doing my very best.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): We'll have to do better.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Madam Speaker, apparently some days, good just isn't good enough. Again, I state that we're supporting the bill as part of a programming motion, and I think I'm going to leave it at that, because it doesn't appear that they want to hear the story about how they are wrecking Ontario.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm actually going to speak on—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Sorry; in rotation. The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Mr. Paul Miller: I would just like to address the bill.

The bill is a protection of consumers. Over the years, there have been many abuses of the consumer in fine print or advertising or marketing. A lot of different areas have been—how would I put it?—abused by whoever is selling the product or whoever is pushing the product. This bill is a start. Nothing is 100%, but this bill is certainly a start to protect consumers from people knocking on their doors with stories or fabrications about certain items that they may be dealing with.

It's easy to get off the mark when you're standing up to talk about bills and go down a path of accosting whoever the bill's presenter was, and that's easy to do. But unfortunately, you want to talk about the content. You want to talk about the weaknesses and strengths. I'll tell you, the member from Bramalea—Gore—Malton, as much as it may have been boring for the official opposition, hit on many, many points that were very important about bettering the bill, certainly adding good content, good dialogue and good information. He has done his homework.

A lot of times in this House, people stand up and just don't do their homework, don't even know the content of the bill, and start talking about stuff that hasn't got anything to do with the bill. I see it from the chair you're sitting in many times, Speaker, and that's why we stand up and say, "Stick to the script."

So with all due respect, I do believe that the minister tried, with the limited input she got from other areas, to do the best she could with the people who certainly lobbied her. I think we all get lobbied, and bills are formed through input from the general public, the user groups and other elected officials. I think she really tried to listen, and that's a rare commodity around here in the last few years.

I do believe there is a sense that, in a minority government, people are starting to listen, maybe because they have to or maybe because they really want to do a good job. It's a combination of both, Speaker. I think the whole dialogue around here in the last year and a half has changed, because some people try to stall things from moving ahead; other people—for example, today someone stood up and said something about my individual involvement in something which had nothing to do with

it at all. It was fabricated totally, and it was just off the mark. It wasn't on track. It had nothing to do with what we were talking about. I was quite shocked that the member from Barrie did that, but unfortunately he decided that, for whatever reason—maybe the numbers are bad, or maybe—

Mr. Todd Smith: I don't think you're talking about the bill.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm not sure why he did that, but it all boils down to sticking to the script. A lot of people don't do that. In this particular case, I think I've stuck to the script. I tried to address the bill that was brought forward. Unfortunately, there are individuals in here who wander on a regular basis, and that's unfortunate. What I can say is—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: And when are you going to speak to the bill?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'm waiting for the member from Nipissing, because he's so informative, to speak about the bill. I'm sure he's going to share his boundless wisdom with us. I can't wait.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'm here to share my boundless wit and information. I'm sorry I won't be speaking on the Fedeli Focus on Finance today. I am actually going to speak on Bill 55.

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Quote page 3. It's pretty good stuff.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Oh, thank you. Yes, it actually was.

Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act. While it's my hope to support this legislation once it comes to a final vote, it's important to first understand and address the issues the bill will have an impact on. Bill 55, if passed, will affect three different pieces of legislation, and I plan to take some time—10 minutes, in fact—to address each individually.

It will impact the Consumer Protection Act with regard to the cooling-off period for consumers surrounding water heaters, the Collection Agencies Act surrounding rules for debt settlers, and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act specifically dealing with impacts on the removal of the fee and commission restriction.

It's the government's role to ensure any consumer legislation of this kind creates a safe and trusting business environment. Sadly, with this government, many of the bills we've seen in both the past and current sessions are heavy on presentation—and actually names, good names—but light on content. Again, it's proof, Speaker, that nothing has changed under this Premier.

So what will this bill do? On rules regarding debt settlement, it will mandate that all contracts be in writing. It will set a cap on the fee that may be charged for debt settlement services. It will prohibit debt settlers from charging upfront fees, and establishes a 10-day cooling-off period for consumers. It also mandates certain disclosures and forbids certain advertising practices, while establishing penalties for contravening the act.

On the contentious issue of door-to-door sales, Bill 55 would double the cooling-off period for water heater door-to-door purchases, something we all hear a lot about, and leaves the door open for other cooling-off periods to be doubled as well. It will forbid new suppliers from installing a new water heater for 20 days and make a new supplier liable for cancellation charges if one is installed within 20 days. It also would require all sales to be in writing and recorded, with scripted follow-up sales calls to the consumer.

1730

For the real estate industry, it will remove the restriction against charging both a fee and a commission for selling or buying a house and mandate that offers for property be made in writing. It will also allow the consumer to inquire with the Real Estate Council of Ontario as to whether other offers were made on the property, in a bid for greater transparency.

So let's examine some of the reasons the government is bringing this legislation forward in the first place. The government wants to appear to be tackling certain areas of consumer services that involve high-pressure tactics and generate complaints and, thus, bad press. But although the bill does tackle certain aspects of such tactics, it in no way will improve the consumer experience.

When it comes to debt settlement, there's no doubt the government feels the heat when media stories about loan sharks and customers being taken to the cleaners are reported. No one likes hearing those stories, and, ultimately, it's this government who is held to account when innocent victims are fleeced.

One of the most common consumer complaints we get in my office, and I'm sure in other offices as well, deals with door-to-door water heater sales. Crooked water heater salespeople are likely to target vulnerable or senior Ontarians, generating more media stories and personal stress for the consumer.

It's important to note that this government has not inserted the mandatory follow-up or the mandatory cost disclosure in a door-to-door contract into the legislation but simply creates regulation-making power. Here's the catch: The power to make such a regulation exists already in the Consumer Protection Act, but it is a Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council regulation, not a ministerial one.

This bill also does not address the most frustrating part of changing water heaters, and that's the cancellations and returns. Some companies are known to frustrate consumers prior to finally giving them a tank return number, which the consumer affixes on the tank and brings to a depot. Any minor damage on a 10-year-old tank can be assessed at over \$100 without explanation. When the consumer calls to cancel, the providers are known to use tactics comparable to the high-pressure ones of the door-to-door salesperson.

Because this bill touches their competitors and leaves them more time to retain the customer, one particular company has openly stated it endorses stronger consumer

protection. However, this is coming from the company that currently is the focus of a federal Competition Bureau proceeding against it.

The real estate provision of the bill appears to be the only part of it designed to actually tackle an existing problem without much ado. Ontario is the last province in Canada to have a restriction against custom charges in real estate. Allowing a combination of fees and commissions to be charged on a real estate transaction will allow agents to compete more freely. Also, we are concerned that the requirement to keep copies of all offers will cause unnecessary hurdles linked to storing a large amount of paperwork containing sensitive banking information. If this provision is implemented, the paperwork must be reduced to a simple form.

So how do we go about improving this bill to actually ensure that consumers are adequately protected in Ontario? Let me first address the current situation surrounding debt settlement rules in this province. The framework, as it sits for debt settlement services, does not provide comprehensive enough protection for the consumers. These services are intensely advertised in many media, and Ontarians who resort to these services are usually under intense pressure. We need to ensure that any legislation aimed at protecting consumers surrounding debt settlement contracts makes the chosen settler the recipient of the collection calls. Sadly, this bill falls short on that account.

When it comes to door-to-door selling tactics, it is interesting to know that this bill, in its current form, is endorsed by at least one major player in the industry that, as I said, is under federal investigation by the Competition Bureau.

Our PC caucus disapproves of high-pressure sales tactics that exploit vulnerable people. We see no reason to delegate the implementation of mandatory follow-up calls or mandatory cost-and-service disclosures to these regulations.

Bill 55 also fails to address anti-competitive cancellation and water heater tank return practices, which, in turn, result in frustrated consumers on the phone and spurious damage charges. A vulnerable Ontarian who signs a contract at the door is unlikely to take care of all outstanding issues with their supplier, meaning that once the 20-day cool-off period has passed, the penalties become a liability on the consumer. The question has to be asked: Why is the government more willing to regulate frustrating cancellation procedures in other industries, but not water heaters?

This legislation will also impact the real estate sector. Let me say it is high time for this government to finally act upon the restrictions against custom pricing of real estate services. The bill requires brokers to store copies of all offers without considering that an average binding offer contains very sensitive private information and is several pages long. We need to reduce the potential amount of stored paperwork and private information, maybe through a simplified one-page form that can act as an official record for the Real Estate Council of Ontario.

Phantom offers are an issue that needs to be addressed as well. These high-pressure sales tactics distort the market. A consumer who inquires before making an offer is wisest. However, if he or she has already put in an offer, knowing whether or not he or she was pressured fairly becomes an afterthought.

Speaker, if we are to tackle this issue seriously, we should establish a clear paper trail and transparent disclosure on the offer document such that said offer is made in the knowledge of the existence of other offers, as I've mentioned. This way, no rotten apple can claim the consumer is making false claims when a complaint comes to the Real Estate Council.

Speaker, in closing, I'd like to reiterate that this bill is not perfect, but with the amendments my fellow colleagues in the PC caucus are proposing, it is something that could be supported. It's my hope members from all sides of the House will work to improve this legislation at committee and bring forward something that truly acts in the best interests of consumers here in Ontario.

In my closing seconds, for the member opposite, I would like to remind them that the new and fourth issue of Fedeli Focus on Finance, eagerly anticipated, will come out in another week, but you can go to www.fedeli.com to download it.

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

Pursuant to the order of the House dated Thursday, October 3, 2013, I am now required to put the question.

Ms. MacCharles has moved third reading of Bill 55, An Act to amend the Collection Agencies Act, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

Pursuant to standing order 28(h), a request that the vote on third reading of Bill 55 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, November 27.

Third reading vote deferred.

WASTE REDUCTION ACT, 2013 LOI DE 2013 SUR LA RÉDUCTION DES DÉCHETS

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 21, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 91, An Act to establish a new regime for the reduction, reuse and recycling of waste and to repeal the Waste Diversion Act, 2002 / Projet de loi 91, Loi créant un nouveau cadre pour la réduction, la réutilisation et le recyclage des déchets et abrogeant la Loi de 2002 sur le réacheminement des déchets.

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

Mrs. Jane McKenna: It is my pleasure to rise to join debate around the government's Bill 91, a bill long on promise but short on follow-through. This bill would replace the existing Waste Diversion Act, and, if the minister is to be believed, crack open the recycling bottleneck and ramp up diversion rates. The minister has expressed hopes that doing so would nudge the private sector into making further investments, leading to investments in support sectors—more recycling plants, more jobs. What he doesn't mention is the other likelihood: that businesses and jobs will be put at threat when our manufacturers are saddled with half a billion dollars in new costs. We have had numerous reminders in the past month of the kind of stresses that this sector is facing. We need to listen.

1740

Ever since this province's first-ever eco taxes were introduced on Canada Day in 2008, the Ontario PC Party has been pressing this government to discard them. These levies have forced Ontario consumers to pick up the tab for recycling tires, electronics, paint cans and batteries by springing an eco premium on them at the cash register.

In November last year, our environment critic presented a bold plan to protect our environment, lower costs for businesses and treat recyclable materials not as waste but as valuable resources that we should recover and recycle into new products. Under this plan, the Ontario PC Party pledged to scrap eco taxes, get rid of Liberal recycling cartels and put the province's toothless waste diversion watchdog out of its misery.

We also said we would continue to build on the success of the blue box program created by the former PC government. This was done through consultation with municipalities, environmental groups and industry representatives, all working together, all working on developing a real solution.

The Liberals are certainly promoting recycling in a sense, lifting some of our proposals for use here. That's fine, and it's flattering, Speaker. But it's also an admission of the Liberal government's failure to create the right policies to increase Ontario's recycling rate, which has been stalled below 25% for a decade under this Liberal government. Ontario now boasts an appalling waste diversion rate of just 23%.

If that's not depressing enough, consider that in a 2004 discussion paper on its 60% diversion target, the Ministry of the Environment had projected an ambitious four-year timeline for improving on its diversion rate at the time: 28%. Five years after the 2008 deadline, we find that the ministry has managed to divert another 5% of waste—to landfill. Data from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing for the year 2002 put the median waste diversion rate of Ontario's municipalities at 27%. I'm happy to report that Halton region fared much better, at 38%. But those numbers are weighed down by poor diversion rates in the industrial, commercial and institutional, or IC&I, sector.

The Auditor General's 2012 review of non-hazardous waste disposal and diversion showed the IC&I sector,

which generates approximately 60% of the province's waste, manages to divert only about 12% of its waste. This failure has been most visible in a major decline in recycling among industries, businesses and public institutions.

For the last decade, the Liberals have basically ignored this sector, which accounts for 60% of Ontario's waste. As a result, its recycling rate has slumped. Ontario's Auditor General explained that the IC&I sector has been poorly regulated because, "The ministry did not have adequate information on either the number of businesses or organizations to which the regulations applied or which segments of the IC&I sector generated the largest amounts of waste so that it might target them for inspection." That's a pretty significant oversight, Speaker.

Stewardship Ontario was set up under the Eves government to serve as a financing organization to reimburse municipalities for 50% of costs of blue box recycling. But Stewardship Ontario underwent serious mission creep after its creation, most noticeably with the creation of the so-called eco fee, introduced in 2008 on a small number of items: paint, solvents and tires. The eco fee was quietly expanded to 9,000 potentially toxic household items, such as fire extinguishers and household cleaners, on Canada Day 2010. Public outcry was fierce, and the Liberals rolled it back three months later.

Even aside from being an irritation to consumers, eco fees are not as effective as many would think. This is partly because the habit-changing incentive is less than clear. Some critics suggest that eco fees can be the equivalent of an indulgence, the historic and long-discarded practice of buying yourself clean of sin. Eco fees give consumers the impression that by paying a premium, they've done their environmental duty, so excessive and carefree consumption can actually be encouraged, not discouraged, leading to more waste.

As has been stated previously, we currently export a third of our waste to the United States every year. That's a pretty miserable definition of waste diversion.

Bill 91 has the explicit goal of revoking the Waste Diversion Act, which was passed by the former PC government as a way to extend the life of Ontario landfills, create jobs in the recycling sector and assist our municipal partners by creating a more stable Blue Box Program. But while Bill 91 would technically repeal the Waste Diversion Act, as it says at the head of the bill's explanatory note, it also allows for the continuation of this program set out under the old act.

Bill 91 continues every eco tax program brought forward by the Liberals and will lead to hundreds of millions of dollars in new costs, costs hidden from consumers.

Bill 91 not only falls short of our party's call to scrap eco taxes, it also fails to eliminate the Liberals' secretive and unaccountable oversight agency, Waste Diversion Ontario. Not only that, but the Liberals apparently plan to give Waste Diversion Ontario greater powers, both enforcement powers and the authority to set and collect

the fees from businesses. These fees would then be passed on to consumers as part of the cost displayed on a given product's price tag.

Bill 91 fails to meet the Ontario PCs' two biggest demands: scrap eco taxes and eliminate useless bureaucrats. The bill would not discard eco taxes, just move them around, displaying them on price tags rather than on receipts.

The Waste Reduction Act is essentially a shell game that moves eco taxes from consumers' receipts to price tags on store shelves. That's a dubious victory for transparency and accountability, Speaker, and it is part of why speakers in these seats say that we cannot support Bill 91.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I would like to thank the member from Burlington for her remarks. I would like to remind everybody that we've had 16.5 hours of debate—more than 50 people. I respectfully submit that maybe it's time to get this to committee and get on with other business that is important to the people of Ontario.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I've sat here for days on end, listening to see if there was any light at the end of the tunnel on this Bill 91. I'm still disappointed, and I'll tell you why.

The bill purports to do things that it actually doesn't do. If you want to look to some reference, we support the intent but not the methodology they're using here. Our critic Michael Harris and his staff—and I would have to say Shane Buckingham and Rebecca—have dissected this Bill 91 in such a way that it's made it very clear to Sony and many large companies that this simply doesn't do what it says it does. What it does is hide the eco tax. We really won't know—there's no accountability in this bill—how much they're actually collecting and, furthermore, what they're actually spending it on. We can't tolerate these kinds of inconsistencies in the goals that are laid out. If we put on the table—our critic Michael Harris, I think, to go back on this one, has put a number of recommendations on the table to make this clear.

We want to have the waste producers having a voice in this. This is an economy based on innovation and creativity, and they're telling Sony and other large companies that are moving out of the province of Ontario—job loss—that they can't do the job or can't be trusted.

What I find from this government is, they can't be trusted. That's the problem. That's what I find out now. Even when you look at the deal they made with the Ring of Fire—they've walked away. Where does it end? Where do we get Ontario back on the right footing? We have to have an economy here. We need a strategy for jobs and the economy.

1750

Yes, we need to look at dealing with waste and waste reduction, certainly recycling, but I would say that in my riding of Durham, we have an example that the ministry

has looked at, the first energy-from-waste plant in Ontario in modern times. It's the Covanta plant in my riding. That's one of the options that should be on the table. It is the future. It's being used in other jurisdictions and it's being ignored by the—

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much. I move unanimous consent that the order of the House dated November 4, 2013, referring Bill 105, An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act, 2013, to the Standing Committee on General—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Sorry to interrupt you, but you need to wait until the comments and questions are finished before you have a point of order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I'll rise on a point of order at that time.

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

Further comments and questions?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Just to comment, again, as my colleague from Ottawa said earlier, this matter has been debated for 16 hours now in this Legislature. I think that over 50 members have spoken. I listened carefully to what the members for Durham and Burlington had to say. Frankly, for the most part, it's repeating things that have been said over and over again on that side of the House. I appreciate their willingness to continue to debate, but at the same time, I think we've heard everything we could possibly hear about this bill. In fact, most of the time, they talk about other things.

I think it's time to close off debate on this, Madam Speaker. I think this debate has run its course—16 hours, 50 MPPs who have spoken. They've all had interesting things to say, but the time has come now to get on with things.

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

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm glad to be able to add to this debate. I know I've had a number of minutes to speak previously. I would like to just commend my colleague from Burlington, who is standing up for her constituents and the people of Ontario.

Speaker, I can tell you that Bill 91 is going to kill jobs here in the province of Ontario. We've heard sad news again today of hundreds of jobs being lost at Sears Canada. Another day, another story of job losses in the province of Ontario. Bill 91 is going to kill jobs. It's also going to make life more affordable for families in the province of Ontario—

Interjection: Unaffordable.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Sorry. It's going to make life more unaffordable for families in the province of Ontario.

I remember the eco fee debate all too well. I remember working in our family's hardware store back in the

summer of 2010. The best example I have of the Liberal government soaking and hosing the people of Ontario is over a bag of concrete mix, one of the most popular products in any hardware and building supply store in the province. A bag of concrete mix sold for \$3.99 on June 30, 2010. Because of the Liberal eco tax grab, that bag of concrete mix sold for \$7.99 on July 2, when stores reopened. I can tell you that the eco fee scam is continuing under Bill 91, except it's going to be hidden in the cost of products.

A bag of grass seed has a 50-cent eco fee. You added an eco tax to the price of cattle manure and sheep manure and all kinds of garden products. It made no sense. It was nothing but a tax grab. This Bill 91 is going to bury those fees in the price of products as well as kill thousands of jobs. In fact, electronic consumer companies are going to leave this province, move their head offices across to the States—

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

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thanks to the members of this House who have spoken earlier in this debate, both today and in the days before. Returning to my earlier comments, I have many concerns with Bill 91. It is unfortunate to see such vague and toothless legislation held up as a bold new approach to what is a critical concern to all the people of Ontario. There is no clear indication that enforcement standards and oversight of performance will improve on the current status quo. That is a huge missed opportunity.

It is also disappointing to see this government talk about further burdening consumers as if it was fresh thinking, Speaker. We know that Bill 91 will be bad for consumers. We will continue to pay eco taxes, and we will also be forced to pay new fees to underwrite the expansion of an ineffective recycling bureaucracy. More red tape, more bureaucracy and more taxes: Is this the best and most creative economic thinking that this government can summon up?

It is unfortunate that this government has chosen to ignore the Ontario PC plan to better protect our environment, lower costs for businesses and treat recyclable materials not as waste but as valuable resources that we should recover and recycle into new products. You're welcome to dip into our white papers at any time you're spinning your wheels. Those are still worthy ideas, and they would go a long way to improve Bill 91.

I am happy to have been part of this debate, which I believe helps expand awareness around this important area of concern. Unfortunately though, Speaker, as things stand, I cannot support Bill 91 in its present form.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Point of order, yes.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I move unanimous consent 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 the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and that the committee meet for one day of public hearings and one day of clause-by-clause, as scheduled by the subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

Thank you for the opportunity to rise on a point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Is there consent? I heard a no.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

FIREFIGHTING

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question concerning the Pembroke fire base. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You're correct: I was disappointed in the answer by the Minister of Natural Resources to my question, which I asked last Wednesday, November 20. I suppose maybe if there was more time, I might have gotten a little more in my answer, but I specifically asked for some information with regard to a thorough analysis of the decision to close the fire base in Pembroke.

This came down in a letter from the minister on November 7 with no notice—no notice whatsoever, no warning. That was the notice that effective December 31, end of the year 2013, the fire base in Pembroke would close. Also they were going to be closing a base in Kirkland Lake, which was ordered closed years ago, but with some pressure from the community has been kept open until this time. In fact, it was ordered closed maybe 15 years ago.

What I've asked from the minister is to justify your decision. He's gone on about, well, they're making investments in other areas. That doesn't answer the issue of closing a fire base in Pembroke.

As I've said, response times are critical when you're dealing with forest fires—absolutely critical. If you're there early, a fire that is caught in its embryonic stage, so to speak, can be dealt with quite easily. But once a fire gets a foothold or a toehold, it can be disastrous. We've seen that many, many times throughout the province of Ontario, depending upon the season, what kind of fire season it has been.

1800

So he's planning now to service Pembroke, displacing these jobs, local people, and servicing out of Haliburton.

Well, anybody who understands the geography of Ontario knows that that's not going to be simple. It's a long way; it's an hour by helicopter. So if you're going to be ferrying crews by helicopter, you can't put a big crew on a helicopter. Have you ever flown a helicopter? Our helicopters don't take a lot of payload. You can't put a whole lot of people into one of these helicopters.

Secondly, if a crew has to be dispatched from Haliburton to deal with a fire in the Pembroke district, you're going to have to deal with the accommodation costs for those people. They're not going to be living at home; they're not going to be staying at home and fighting those fires. They are actually going to be put up in motels when they are not fighting the fires.

So these are 20 positions—five fire crews of four persons each—that have been stationed there for decades. I met with a group of them, three senior firefighters, all of them with over 30 years' experience. They're not impressed with this decision whatsoever.

So I've asked the minister—and the minister didn't seem to respond to this part of it. He did call the mayor of Pembroke, Ed Jacyno, who I know very well. In fact, my condolences to Ed; I was at his mother's funeral last week. I'm not sure why the minister would be calling Ed Jacyno. He's the mayor of the city of Pembroke. The city of Pembroke has its own professional firefighting department. They are not affected by this decision, other than that some of their residents will be affected, but these people don't live necessarily in the city of Pembroke; they live in the area around Pembroke. But I guess the minister thought he was covering all his bases, no pun intended.

What he failed to do was make a call to Tammy Stewart, the reeve of Head, Clara and Maria, who has an agreement with the Ministry of Natural Resources to provide all of their fire services, because 330 people live in the townships of Head, Clara and Maria—which, incidentally, is adjacent to one of our crown jewels, Algonquin Park. So if we close that fire base, not only are we not going to have any fire services in Head, Clara and Maria, because the MNR has provided those services, but who's going to be providing the services for the northeast side of Algonquin Park, the needed quick response, in case of an emergency?

The other thing I wanted to talk about—I can't believe how fast five minutes goes—is the work that these fire crews do that has nothing to do with fighting fires: repairing docks, dealing with flooding in the spring, all kinds of different maintenance work that we'll have to hire more people to do. The savings are not there. I've asked the minister to show me where the savings are; I defy him to be able to do that. And the risk continues to grow.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): The parliamentary assistant has up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I could have used more time. At least they didn't interrupt me this time.

Mr. John Fraser: I would have given you a bit of mine.

It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. Madam Speaker, our government's top priority is public safety, and we will continue to protect people, protect property, protect our natural resources from forest fires. Ontario is recognized around the world for its ability to respond strategically to forest fires and protect public safety.

Ontario's fire management program has evolved to deal with the challenges and opportunities of the unique forest and landscape of Ontario. The program takes advantage of the abundance of lakes and rivers across our province to fight fires with available water, whether delivered by pumps and hoses on the ground or dropped from a plane or a helicopter.

The fire management program also excels at collecting and analyzing information about weather patterns and other factors to predict where fires will occur and how they will behave. The program can then pre-position resources around the province before fires occur or spread for the most effective fire suppression.

The Ministry of Natural Resources is modernizing this program and consolidating resources at larger strategic bases. We will still be operating out of 33 fire response facilities across the province and maintaining approximately the same number of firefighting staff and support staff. These changes will not affect our ability to protect the Pembroke community.

Madam Speaker, our fire management program is flexible and mobile. The Ministry of Natural Resources routinely redeploys staff, aircraft and equipment quickly to respond to forest fires and changing hazard levels. We operate all fire facilities as a network that responds to fires wherever they occur. Every day of the fire season, we assess the need for firefighting resources and move staff and equipment to where fire hazard levels and suppression demands are the highest. Fire staff are transferred from other parts of the province as soon as they are required.

For example, a devastating forest fire occurred in Kirkland Lake in the spring of 2012. On a seasonal basis, the Kirkland Lake facility houses 20 or fewer staff. More than 140 fire program staff were quickly transferred from other parts of the province to help fight this fire.

In addition, the Ministry of Natural Resources has long-standing arrangements with municipal partners in Pembroke and CFB Petawawa to respond to local forest fires. Using these partnerships, the Ministry of Natural Resources is able to rapidly deploy staff, aircraft and equipment to deal with local fire hazards.

The fire management program anticipates offering up to 48 new seasonal positions in the northeast fire region, starting next year at bases in areas such as Cochrane, Sudbury and Timmins.

The Ministry of Natural Resources continues to invest in our fire management program, including the investment of \$8.5 million in a new flight simulator facility in Sault Ste. Marie, which will provide advanced training to fire crews. By eliminating the need to send pilots out of

the province for training, this centre will provide a long-term, cost-effective solution for managing forest fires. It will also attract pilots from other areas to train and practice, helping to support the local economy.

As well, we recently made a significant investment of \$47 million at our Haliburton, Sudbury and Armstrong facilities. This investment will provide increased safety to communities and better protect our province's forests. The current base in Armstrong is in dire need of being upgraded, as several of the existing buildings are more than 50 years old. These buildings will be demolished and new ones will be constructed.

We also invested in Sudbury, where we will be renovating the Sudbury Forest Fire Management Centre.

The existing facility is also in need of an upgrade, which will include the purchase of a nearby aviation hangar.

In Haliburton, we will be building a new fire management headquarters at the Haliburton/Stanhope Municipal Airport. The existing facility is located in downtown Haliburton, but the initial suppression attacks via helicopter are launched from the airport. Once construction of the new facility is complete, firefighters will no longer have to travel between the two locations to respond to wildfires.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Julia Munro): There being no further matters to debate, this House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1807.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneur: Hon. / L'hon. David C. Onley, O.Ont.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Bartolucci, Rick (LIB)	Sudbury	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough–Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire de parti reconnu
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Minister of the Environment / Ministre de l'Environnement Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Cansfield, Donna H. (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	
Del Duca, Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	Deputy House Leader, Recognized Party / Leader parlementaire adjointe de parti reconnu
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Attorney General / Procureur général
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Holyday, Douglas C. (PC)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment / Ministre du Développement économique, du Commerce et de l'Emploi
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
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	
Jackson, Rod (PC)	Barrie	
Jaczek, Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jeffrey, Hon. / L'hon. Linda (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Klees, Frank (PC)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Rural Affairs / Ministre des Affaires rurales
Leone, Rob (PC)	Cambridge	
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Consumer Services / Ministre des Services aux consommateurs
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Marchese, Rosario (NDP)	Trinity–Spadina	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Mauro, Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonnell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McKenna, Jane (PC)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
McNeely, Phil (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
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
Milligan, Rob E. (PC)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
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

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-présidente du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham–Kent–Essex	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Natural Resources / Ministre des Richesses naturelles
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Piruzza, Hon. / L'hon. Teresa (LIB)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Prue, Michael (NDP)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Schein, Jonah (NDP)	Davenport	
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	

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Michael Prue
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

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Kevin Daniel Flynn
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

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
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

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Rick Bartolucci
Laura Albanese, Rick Bartolucci
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Percy Hatfield
Mitzie Hunter, Jim McDonell
Randy Pettapiece, Monique Taylor
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Phil McNeely
Teresa J. Armstrong, Steven Del Duca
Bob Delaney, Frank Klees
Jack MacLaren, Phil McNeely
Rob E. Milligan, Shafiq Qaadri
Jonah Schein
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Garfield Dunlop
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bas Balkissoon, Grant Crack
Vic Dhillon, Garfield Dunlop
Cindy Forster, Lisa MacLeod
Amrit Mangat, Michael Mantha
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Norm Miller
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Toby Barrett
Toby Barrett, Lorenzo Berardinetti
France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely
Norm Miller, 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**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: John Vanthof
Donna H. Cansfield, Dipika Damerla
John Fraser, Monte Kwinter
Jane McKenna, Rick Nicholls
Peter Tabuns, John Vanthof
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
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

Continued from back cover

**MEMBERS' STATEMENTS /
DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS**

Order of business	
Mr. Michael Harris.....	4651
Child poverty	
Mr. Jonah Schein.....	4651
Dr. Norman Bethune Collegiate Institute	
Ms. Soo Wong.....	4652
Mining industry	
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	4652
Wortley Village	
Ms. Peggy Sattler	4652
Rotary clubs auction	
Ms. Mitzie Hunter	4652
Home care	
Ms. Sylvia Jones	4653
Fromagerie St-Albert	
M. Grant Crack	4653
Royal Agricultural Winter Fair	
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	4653
Visitor	
Hon. Glen R. Murray	4654

**INTRODUCTION OF BILLS /
DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI**

Promoting Educational Success Tax Credit Act, 2013, Bill 140, Mr. Leone / Loi de 2013 sur le crédit d'impôt favorisant la réussite scolaire, projet de loi 140, M. Leone	
First reading agreed to.....	4654
Mr. Rob Leone	4654
Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2013, Bill 141, Mr. Murray / Loi de 2013 sur l'infrastructure au service de l'emploi et de la prospérité, projet de loi 141, M. Murray	
First reading agreed to.....	4654

**STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY
AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS
MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES**

Infrastructure planning	
Hon. Glen R. Murray	4654
National Housing Day	
Hon. John Gerretsen.....	4655
Infrastructure planning	
Mr. Frank Klees	4656

National Housing Day	
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	4656
Infrastructure planning	
Mr. Percy Hatfield.....	4657
National Housing Day	
Ms. Cindy Forster.....	4657

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Environmental protection	
Mr. John O'Toole	4658
Minimum wage	
Ms. Peggy Sattler	4658
Small business	
Ms. Soo Wong.....	4658
Hydro rates	
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	4658
Waste reduction	
Ms. Mitzie Hunter	4659
Lyme disease	
Mr. Rick Nicholls.....	4659
Minimum wage	
Mr. Jagmeet Singh	4659
Long-term care	
Mr. Grant Crack	4659
Ontario Drug Benefit Program	
Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	4660
Air quality	
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	4660
Waste reduction	
Mr. John Fraser	4660
Darlington nuclear generating station	
Mr. John O'Toole.....	4660
Waste reduction	
Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn	4660

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013, Bill 55, Ms. MacCharles / Loi de 2013 renforçant la protection du consommateur ontarien, projet de loi 55, Mme MacCharles	
Hon. Tracy MacCharles	4661
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	4664
Mr. Jagmeet Singh	4665
Mr. Toby Barrett	4671
Mr. John Yakabuski	4672
Mr. Paul Miller.....	4673
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	4674
Third reading vote deferred.....	4675

**Waste Reduction Act, 2013, Bill 91, Mr. Bradley /
Loi de 2013 sur la réduction des déchets, projet de
loi 91, M. Bradley**

Mrs. Jane McKenna.....	4676
Mr. John Fraser.....	4677
Mr. John O'Toole	4677
Hon. Brad Duguid.....	4677
Mr. Monte McNaughton.....	4677
Mrs. Jane McKenna.....	4678
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	4678

**ADJOURNMENT DEBATE / DÉBAT SUR
LA MOTION D'AJOURNEMENT**

Firefighting

Mr. John Yakabuski.....	4678
Mr. John Fraser.....	4679

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Tuesday 26 November 2013 / Mardi 26 novembre 2013

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2013, Bill 122, Mrs. Sandals / Loi de 2013 sur la négociation collective dans les conseils scolaires, projet de loi 122, Mme Sandals

Ms. Sylvia Jones	4629
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	4630
Hon. John Gerretsen.....	4631
Mr. John O'Toole.....	4631
Ms. Cindy Forster	4631
Ms. Sylvia Jones	4631
Ms. Laurie Scott	4632
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	4633
Hon. Jeff Leal.....	4634
Mr. John O'Toole.....	4634
Mr. Jagmeet Singh	4634
Ms. Laurie Scott	4635
Mr. Todd Smith.....	4635
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	4637
Hon. John Milloy	4637
Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	4637
Ms. Cindy Forster	4637
Mr. Todd Smith.....	4638
Mr. Michael Harris.....	4638
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	4639

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Hon. Michael Gravelle	4640
M. Grant Crack	4640
Mr. Todd Smith.....	4640
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	4640
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	4640
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	4640
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	4640
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	4640
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4640
Mr. Robert Bailey	4640
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac).....	4640

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Manufacturing jobs

Mr. Tim Hudak	4640
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne.....	4641

Pan Am Games

Mr. Rod Jackson.....	4642
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	4642
Hon. John Milloy	4643

Mining industry

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	4643
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	4643

Job creation

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	4643
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	4644

Mining industry

Mr. Norm Miller.....	4644
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	4644

Child poverty

Ms. Cheri DiNovo	4645
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	4645
Hon. Teresa Piruzza	4645

Climate change

Mr. Phil McNeely.....	4646
Hon. Bob Chiarelli	4646

Chris Mazza

Mr. Frank Klees	4646
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4646

Health care funding

Mme France Gélinas	4647
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4647

Affordable housing

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri.....	4647
Hon. Linda Jeffrey.....	4647

Hospital funding

Mr. Tim Hudak.....	4648
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4648

Long-term care

Miss Monique Taylor	4649
Hon. Deborah Matthews	4649

Great Lakes water quality

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn	4649
Hon. James J. Bradley	4649

Environmental protection

Mr. John O'Toole.....	4650
Hon. James J. Bradley	4650

Legal aid

Mr. Jagmeet Singh	4651
Hon. John Gerretsen.....	4651

Continued on inside back cover