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of Ontario

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Mercredi 26 mars 2014

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 26 March 2014

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 26 mars 2014

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

**RESIGNATION OF MEMBER
FOR BRAMPTON–SPRINGDALE**

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the membership of the House by reason of the resignation of Linda Jeffrey as the member for the electoral district of Brampton–Springdale, effective March 25, 2014.

Accordingly, I have issued a warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for a by-election.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

**ONTARIO IMMIGRATION ACT, 2014
LOI DE 2014 SUR L'IMMIGRATION
EN ONTARIO**

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 20, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 161, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 161, Loi portant sur l'immigration en Ontario et apportant une modification connexe à la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise today and debate Bill 161, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act. Thankfully, there's a short title for this bill: the Ontario Immigration Act.

In 2015, the federal government will be introducing the expression-of-interest immigration reforms to make the Canadian immigration system more responsive to changing labour market demands. Due to these impending reforms, the federal government has in fact encouraged the provinces to develop systems that will allow them to participate in the EOI system after 2015. The Ontario Immigration Act is this provincial government's attempt to get in line with upcoming changes.

Regardless of whether or not this legislation passes, Ontario must jointly share responsibility with the federal government when it comes to immigration. Bill 161—

that I will be supporting; I want you to know, Speaker, that I will be supporting Bill 161, in case that hadn't been clear already—we will be supporting at second reading, but not without some reservations. This bill does a number of things well, and I look forward to discussing some of these areas, but at the same time the bill does contain a couple of causes for concern. The bill seeks to create yet another government bureaucracy, and while the Liberal government claims the new layer of bureaucracy will be revenue-neutral, I'm worried that this will not be the case once this bill is introduced.

Perhaps most importantly of all, this bill fails to get to the root of the matter for immigration in Ontario. To actually ensure Ontario continues to attract the best and brightest from around the world, we must address the province's job crisis and balance the books as soon as possible. Anything less, in my opinion, would be a disservice to the countless immigrants who have decided to call Ontario home.

During my time in office, I've had the remarkable opportunity to meet and chat with people throughout the province, and have met many newcomers as well. You really do learn something every day in this job, and learning about the many different cultures that make up Ontario is one of the most rewarding experiences that I really have ever had.

In my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, we have people from around the world immigrating here—well, there—people from Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, South America and, of course, other parts of North America, including the USA and Mexico. It all seems that cultures are united by their love of three things: family, friends and food. But in all seriousness, Mr. Speaker, Ontario is a province built by immigration.

These newcomers to Ontario are often fiercely proud of the province and country that welcomed them with open arms. Hearing their excitement, their enthusiasm to simply be here should serve as a constant reminder to all of us of just how lucky we are to live in such a great part of the world. Some are born here; others come by choice. But at the end of the day, we're all proud to call Ontario and Canada home.

For those who have decided to move to Ontario rather than any other place in the world, we owe it to them to deliver on the promise that their new home is indeed a land of opportunity. There needs to be a real chance to gain meaningful employment for all Ontarians of this province to continue to attract the best and brightest from around the world. To current Ontarians, we have the

responsibility to ensure that our immigration system responds to the needs of the province.

In many areas of the province, including my riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, populations are decreasing and there is a demand for skilled jobs and health care professionals. A well-thought-out, responsive immigration system can help address these concerns. Luckily, the federal government is leading the way and taking a responsible approach to immigration policy reform. Ontario must work together with the federal government to ensure that Ontario's economic needs are met by new Canadians. However, we have at times seen a reluctance to work with the federal government by the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals. Lately, Ontarians have seen the Minister of Transportation berating federal ministers on social media, while the finance minister blames Ottawa for the Liberals' own economic mismanagement.

That's not what my constituents want to see and, quite frankly, I don't think anyone in Ontario wants to see that. My constituents want to see a government that's willing to work with others for the betterment of all, not jeopardize our ability to compete on a global market by failing to work in good faith with other governments. Ontarians want and need to see action from their government. By playing political games, the Liberals may have compromised Ontario's ability to attract highly desired skilled immigrants to the province. For the sake of my constituents, I hope that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has been able to take a more diplomatic approach than some of his cabinet colleagues have shown in recent weeks.

One of the key areas that Bill 161 seeks to address is the provincial nominee program. This program is designed to fill labour shortages by allowing employers who can't find qualified Ontarians to sponsor prospective immigrants and allow the province to nominate these individuals on their behalf, tailoring immigration to the province's labour needs. Currently, Ontario has 2,500 provincial nominee spots available, while provinces like Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan have 5,000 spots available. Provinces like Manitoba and Saskatchewan, that have taken full advantage of this program, have seen their immigration rates double and triple respectively. As a result, these provinces enjoy some of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.

Meanwhile in Ontario, our overall share of immigration continues to fall. It's not hard to understand why. When looking at Ontario, immigrants see a province with high debt, high taxes and an increasing lack of job opportunities. Many immigrants leaving countries with corrupt governments place a high value on accountability and transparency. Prospective Ontarians may think twice to move to a province whose government is under police investigation for the deletion of public documents. Government secrecy and a lack of accountability is what many immigrants have left behind, and they will not tolerate it in their new home.

The Ontario PC Party believes that every single new Canadian should have a chance to work and prosper here

in Ontario, and I really hope that that is also shared by the other parties in this hallowed sanctuary, the Ontario Legislature. That is our province's tradition—that's how Ontario was built—a chance for people to prosper and work in a place where they can be free and grow and enjoy the fruits of our country.

0910

On this side of the House, we've been waiting to see a comprehensive jobs plan from the government for months. The opposition cleared the decks at the end of last year to allow the government to bring forward a jobs plan. We're still anxiously awaiting the arrival of this jobs plan.

To truly serve our new citizens, we must ensure that their new home is prosperous. They come to Ontario seeking opportunity and the chance to get a good job, with the hope of future generations to find even more success. We fear that Ontario is losing that prosperity. What was once a shining beacon of opportunity is now a faint glimmer of hope.

Ontario alone received half of Canada's newcomers in 2006. As of 2012, Ontario only received 38% of newcomers to Canada. That's a shocking statistic.

New Canadians do their homework. Picking a new home is one of the most important decisions you could ever make, and it's clear to new Canadians that Ontario is not the engine of Confederation that it once was. Increasingly, new Canadians are deciding to move to other provinces where prospects are in fact better. This trend may have severe consequences for many of our communities.

I might add that we've put together a plan that will once again allow Ontario to be the engine of what I would call prosperity, which will attract more people. The old adage "Build it and they will come"—let's build an economy where energy rates are low, where red tape is cut, and where there's plenty of opportunity. Let's increase manufacturing. We can do this, and we can do it together, but we need to have that opportunity.

Between the 2006 and 2011 censuses, the population in Chatham–Kent, my riding area, dropped by 4.2%. I might add, Speaker, that in our riding of Chatham–Kent–Essex, we have lost over 11,000 manufacturing jobs since 2003. That is drastic. That's tragic. That is so unfortunate.

I see people, a lot of these people—back in my earlier years, I played sports with them; I taught some of their kids in some of my training programs, and so on. I see these people now hurting and suffering because they have lost their jobs. Companies have actually pulled up, left Chatham, and gone elsewhere—in the world, I might add.

Leamington's overall population remained roughly the same through this period, but there are some troubling realities in the census data. The numbers show that, other than the age groups between 45 and 69, and those 80 and older, Leamington saw a decline through all age groups.

Since then, the news has not been good. Plant closings and downsizings have hit my riding hard over the past few years, while last month—actually, it was several

months ago now, back in November—Heinz announced that they were closing. Last month, there was an indication that they are in fact going to be recouping about 250 of those jobs, but that's still down from 740. It's good news; it's still good news. But, unfortunately, it may not be enough to slow the loss of the population in the area as well.

The initial loss of 740 full-time and 300 seasonal jobs, and the impact on 46 tomato growers, was the darkest day in the history of Leamington. A more positive announcement of a new company creating 250 full-time and additional part-time jobs, as I said before, definitely was welcomed. It's wonderful news. But I still ask the following question to the government: What about the 500-plus people who will still be out of a job? What is being done for them? Therein lies the challenge.

New Canadians come to Canada because they would see Canada as the land of milk and honey. But soon they discover, thanks in large part to what the government has done over the last 11 years, that that milk is sour and the honey has become hard.

While the reform found in this legislation to help Ontario take further advantage of the provincial nominee program is beneficial, it's only one piece of the puzzle. More must be done to attract immigrants beyond the relatively small number of nominees in the program. Solving those issues moves beyond the scope of this particular bill.

The Ontario Immigration Act seeks to allow for the establishment of an employer registry or a recruiter registry. This would mean that there would be a registry for employers to select foreign nationals who provide or offer certain services for a selection program. This section of the bill came about largely to make the province compliant with the expression-of-interest regulations that the federal government will in fact release in 2015. This registry has been called for by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. This will allow employers and immigration consultants to navigate the EOI system. Put simply, it means that we will be better able to address the skills shortages in our labour market more effectively.

The government has in fact suggested that the creation of enforcement and compliance officers will be a revenue-neutral initiative, and therein lies some concern that I have. But without knowing the full scope of what will be needed or how many enforcement officers will be required, the government cannot definitely state that this exercise will in fact be revenue-neutral. We've seen costs quickly get out of hand in this Liberal government, so we'll watch closely to see if these costs grow beyond this initial forecast. Recently, a Toronto Star headline read "Pan Am Games Security Price Tag Jumps to \$239 Million," and further stated that with still more than a year until the 2015 Toronto Pan Am Games, the cost of security is already skyrocketing. On this side of the House, we take all cost estimates with a massive grain of salt.

Bill 161 also includes an amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act that should be highlighted. The

amendment would allow for the creation of regulations that speed up the process of registering as a member of a particular college, requiring that the college of a health profession make registration decisions in "a reasonable time." Well, what exactly is a reasonable amount of time? I'm sure that the respective health profession colleges will work with the government to determine what a reasonable amount of time is.

When it comes to addressing our province's doctor shortage, action can't come soon enough. Sadly, many Ontarians do not have a family doctor, and in rural or remote portions of the province, many residents only have access to a registered nurse on a day-to-day basis. Constituents in my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex certainly understand this reality. Many are unable to find a primary health care provider.

During my time in office, I've been fortunate enough to shadow at both the Leamington District Memorial Hospital and the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance. They were absolutely wonderful hosts. There I was, in scrubs, shadowing doctors and nurses. It was a lot of fun, and it was an incredibly valuable experience for me to see and witness first-hand. While I was there, I was able to see first-hand the kind of quality care that the doctors, triage nurses, volunteers and gerontology emergency management nurses provide.

I was also able to see them struggle to keep up. In Chatham-Kent, there is a massive doctor shortage that the municipality is working hard to try to overcome. I've been told that Essex county alone is in need of over 100 doctors. It's clear that we cannot fill all of these positions solely with doctors from Ontario. For my constituents, it is unacceptable that qualified doctors are unable to practise due to an inefficient bureaucracy, while they are desperately in need of access to health care professionals.

If this government is truly committed to preventive health care, they must take action on this issue now. The health and well-being of our aging population is at stake, as is the health of future generations. This problem today is obvious. It's a problem that exists now, and it could be a crisis tomorrow if steps are not taken.

0920

My constituents hope that this bill can in fact speed up the process of qualified newcomers registering as members of their health profession college. My riding desperately needs more health care providers. I will gladly support an amendment that will help address this crucial concern. It's vital; it's needed.

It's not just my riding. If I look throughout this—

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Northumberland-Quinte West.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Northumberland-Quinte West. You know, I could start rattling off a number of the other ridings as well. They're desperately in need of health care professionals.

Furthermore, if we don't address these critical issues immediately, we run the risk of Ontario becoming a less attractive option for skilled immigrants and foreign entrepreneurs looking to invest in Canada or start a business. We must act to create an environment that promotes

investment in this province. We can do that by getting our fiscal house in order and stabilizing the province after years of credit downgrades and soaring debt. You simply can't continue to attract the number of skilled immigrants that this province requires if you do not have a thriving job market or enough health care professionals to give them proper care once they arrive.

Unless urgent action is in fact taken, Ontario will continue to receive a diminishing share of skilled immigrants. That's unacceptable. We need to again restore the land of milk and honey, not sour milk and hard honey. I remember a saying I learned in school: "Good, better, best, never let it rest / Until the good is better, and the better best." Bill 161 is a good bill; it's a good bill.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: That's an old saying.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It may be an old saying. I may have read it somewhere.

You know, it is in fact important to Ontario's immigration system, and for that reason I will be supporting it, but we must address the bigger picture if our province is to remain a competitive province in the future. We must reverse the trend that sees Ontario losing more and more of its share of skilled immigrants each passing year. And perhaps most of all, we need a strong economy that can provide opportunity to all Ontarians. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to thank the member from Prince Edward–Hastings for his comments. It's not often that MPPs on this side of the Legislature agree with some of the comments that have been made by my friends on the right, but there were a couple of things he mentioned that I found particularly insightful. One is about the barriers that face internationally educated professionals in integrating into our labour market.

I was out in my riding of London West on the weekend. I was in a low-income housing area, and I spoke to a family. The mother was an internationally educated veterinarian; the father was an internationally educated orthopaedic surgeon. Both of them were living on Ontario Works in a low-income housing area and just completely unable to get into our labour market. This is a family that brings incredible skills, incredible expertise and would add real value to our community, and were facing barriers in entering and practising their profession.

The other comment that the member made that I found really insightful was around the need to enable internationally educated health professionals to also get into our labour market—not so much because of population aging, but also because of our increasingly diverse population. We need to have culturally competent health care that responds to the different traditions and cultures that diverse people bring to our communities. So enabling internationally educated health professionals is important to grow our health care workforce but also to respond to the health care needs of our many diverse populations.

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

Hon. Michael Chan: I appreciate the comment by the member from Prince Edward–Hastings and also from London West. Speaker, our proposed legislation is really the beginning, not an end. It is the necessary first step Ontario must take where we are to chart our own course when it comes to attracting more skilled immigrants to drive our economy and really keep Ontario moving forward.

The proposed immigration legislation will strengthen the province's role in immigrant selection and settlement. If passed, it will put the necessary tools in place to keep Ontario welcome to the skilled immigrants it needs to meet future labour needs, improve compliance and enforcement measures, and increase transparency and information sharing to improve immigration selection.

Everyone—really, everyone—has a different recipe for economic success. In Ontario, immigration is a stable ingredient, along with the great public education, skills training, infrastructure renewal and supporting a dynamic business climate.

The proposed legislation is part of the government's economic plan that is creating jobs for today and tomorrow. This legislation, in my opinion, will really be able to attract those economic—and also the immigrants coming to Ontario so that our labour force in particular can be supported moving forward.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I've listened with interest to the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex on this important bill. I wonder if the people who are considering coming to Ontario from other countries are warned about the College of Trades and things like that, and if they're told if they have a trade that when they come to this province, it's going to cost them more money than what they thought because they have to join organizations such as this. They may think twice about coming to Ontario.

And we've seen this. We've seen our own children move west because of different apprenticeship ratios, and they don't have to pay extra fees and taxes just to live in Ontario.

I think we should certainly welcome anyone who wants to come to this province. We do have a doctor shortage in this province, especially rural Ontario. It's getting difficult, even though the Minister of Health claims that we've got 5,000 more doctors in this province.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: Where?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Where are they? They're certainly not in parts of rural Ontario; they're certainly not in Perth–Wellington.

We would have a more welcoming environment in Ontario, I'm sure, if we didn't have these extra fees and taxes that this government seems to be perpetuating all the time, inventing all the time, and nobody wants them. Certainly people in Ontario don't want them, but this government seems to have an attitude that, "We know best," and we know that that's certainly not true.

Although I'm certain we will be supporting this bill, we need to make some changes to make Ontario more welcome.

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

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I enjoyed the presentation made by the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. I enjoyed the humour, which was good, in a controlled sort of way. I thought that was a very, very useful contribution, and the critique was a good one on the whole. In terms of the economic suggestions, I'm not sure we will agree on that and I'll have an opportunity to speak to our differences on that.

0930

But the point around the regulated professions, and the medical profession, in particular, is always debatable. Just to be fair to your government, your previous government, you did open up that regulatory body and allow for 50 medical doctors to come on board. It took a while. Your previous Conservative government opened the door a little bit, and that was a good beginning. The regulatory bodies were resisting it, to be fair, and gradually, over the years, we went from 50 to 100 to 150 to 200. You understand the interesting progression that we made, you made, and the Liberals have made, and there's probably still room for more. Whether we could go to 1,000 immediately, I'm not quite sure, but we have opened up the door in a progressive way that has allowed many of the immigrants who have come to this country with qualifications to be able to practise, and that has been a good thing. Could we be doing more? Probably. But we are moving in the right direction.

I want to speak to the economic differences, but we won't have time. I'll do that as soon as I get my 20 minutes.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I didn't realize that I covered so many different ridings when I was being referenced, but just for the record: Chatham–Kent–Essex.

I do want to thank the member from London West; the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport; my colleague and friend from Perth–Wellington; as well as the always-entertaining member from Trinity–Spadina. He is always a joy to listen to and watch; his theatrics are extremely impressive. But he's also a very knowledgeable man too, and I respect him for that; I truly do.

In the area of Chatham–Kent–Essex, I recall that back in my earlier days—and not the “good, better, best” days, but a little bit beyond that, or closer to where I am now—I worked for a major manufacturer. They employed a number of skilled tradespeople who had come over to Ontario from Great Britain—they were skilled tradesmen; they were journeymen—to see how they would work. These people helped to grow the economy; they helped to grow their companies. They worked hard. They made a good living—decent wages and whatnot. Again, as I said before, they worked very, very hard.

We need to continue to provide those employment opportunities to people so that they can in fact come to Ontario. We need to create the right working environment, and to me, that's all about creating a business climate conducive for companies to invest in Ontario, to come with their money to invest, to create jobs, and to help grow the economy.

That is the land of milk and honey that I've talked about in the past, and I know we can restore that in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Durham stood up and spoke all the time while, right beside him, his speaker was speaking. Amazing.

Further debate?

Mr. Rosario Marchese: We will be supporting Bill 161, so we want to get that out of the way quickly.

I also want to say that I really congratulate the member from Beaches–East York on his presentation. It was an hour long, God bless, but it was a very informative critique of this government and its policies over the years. Those who did not get the opportunity to listen to him should review the Hansard, because I think they will find it very, very useful and informative.

He does give an historical view of immigration in general and, in particular, of what this government has done and not done. He's absolutely right when he says that the provincial Liberal government has absolutely done little on this file for the past 11 years. So when we have a quote of this sort by a Minister of Immigration that says, “We want a really fair relationship with the federal government to ensure that Ontario can have a little bit more control of its destiny when moving forward with immigration,” one has to say, “How long does it take for the government, this provincial government, to establish a fair relationship with the federal government when dealing with immigration issues?” Why does it take 11 years to do something?

It could be that progress with the Liberals is very, very slow, as we've often seen. They tackle problems in a way that is safe, usually not very radical—although every time they bring forth a bill they call it “radical; revolutionary; God, the world is changing,” even if it moves at a snail's pace. But that's beside the point. I think part of the problem is that in the last 11 years we've had eight Ministers of Citizenship and Immigration, which could speak to the fact that nothing happens in that ministry when you change them every year. It takes literally a whole year to learn the file, and by the time they learn the file, somebody else is in that portfolio, which could explain, in part, the inaction of the government. I suspect it's not the whole reason, but it could be partly an explanation for why they move ever so slowly on these files.

The province has “long complained it does not get enough say in immigrant selection.” I think this comes from the Toronto Star, where they say Liberals have “long complained it does not get enough say in immigration selection.” If that is true, it comes to the point

I've already made, which is: Why does it take 11 years to actually get to where they want to be?

So we finally have a program that talks about improving the provincial nominee program, where they go from 2,000—I believe the maximum is 2,000—to 5,000. Part of the problem is that they haven't even used up the quota they have. Even though they could bring in 2,000 provincial nominees, they have not for a long time exhausted the entire amount of provincial nominees they could bring into the province.

Interjection.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you, Minister of the Environment. Good to see you.

So you say to yourself, "Why is the government not using the quota that it has control over and then complaining that they don't get a fair deal from the federal government?" Something is inconsistent and wrong with that kind of policy. The provincial Liberal government does not even use the tools it has to solve many of the immigration problems that it speaks to. And so we have a little problem when it comes to these kinds of things.

The immigration issues are not strictly reserved to the provincial government—quite correctly, as the member from Beaches–East York. This is a federal matter. I have to tell you that I've been a critic of the federal government—both Conservative and Liberal, to be fair to both political parties—on immigration issues for quite some time, because they bring all these immigrants into the country without ever once saying to these wonderful professionals we bring in, "Oh, by the way, you may not get a job in your profession."

We bring them in and ship them out to whatever province they want to go to, and they struggle to find a job in their field. There's no attempt to tell them, "By the way, if you come with this profession, it might be problematic. Perhaps in this province it could be more problematic than others." But there has been an interest and desire to bring in highly qualified professionals, only to find them working in minimum wage jobs, in part-time jobs.

Interjection: Driving taxis.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Driving taxis is the most typical of all the jobs that are often referred to. It demeans their qualifications. It demeans the qualities they have as human beings—as immigrants. Yet we bring them in, ship them away to whatever province they want to go to and leave them without the resources they desperately need.

As a critique, by the way, of the former provincial government, the one named Mike Harris—

Interjections.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Just a little mention.

When it comes to immigration settlement services, we used to have what were called Welcome Houses, which the member from East York talked about, in terms of the incredible value they brought to immigrants who came into the country, into our province. We had five Welcome Houses across the province, to be able to bring them in and integrate them and give them the supports they desperately needed to settle. And what did the

previous provincial government do? They eliminated those Welcome Houses.

0940

On the one hand, the Conservative members talk about how we need to provide more jobs for immigrants who are highly qualified as doctors, to be able to practise, because we desperately need more of them, because we know there are close to one million who don't have a doctor. On the other hand, we've had their government that eliminated the Welcome Houses that provided the support for people to be able to settle in responsible, reasonable, adequate ways—just a little mention.

We have to be consistent with these things, as we speak in support of one thing and, on the other hand, we undermine them by taking away all the supports that they need.

The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex asks, "Well, what is the solution?"—because we have become a province that is begging for federal support. The answer from the Conservative member, and the Conservative Party members in general, is that we should simply be cutting red tape. I don't think it has anything to do with the colour of the tape. That's not going to create any jobs whatsoever. The colour of the tape is irrelevant. We already had a previous government that talked about red tape for years and years, and we didn't see the kind of economic benefits that come with the colour of the tape.

I often said that, mercifully, we had some of that red tape in the economic collapse that befell most of the world, in the US in particular, that brought the whole world down, because of a deregulated world where we have conservative politicians all over the world talking about getting rid of red tape. I said that, mercifully, we have a little red tape here in Canada, enough that we were able to diminish the potential collapse of our own Canadian economy. Every now and then, a little of that colour of tape is helpful in economic, deregulated disasters that the Americans give to us.

The other matter that the Conservatives speak about, in terms of how we create a province that will give better job opportunities and make our province a province that immigrants will flock to again, is the idea of cutting corporate taxes. That is one of the primary objectives of the Conservative Party, as a way of bringing jobs back to the province. My view is, that is a failed economic idea. Even the Liberals have finally come to the conclusion that perhaps that is not the way to go. The Conservatives started it, heavily, by cutting corporate taxes, and the Liberals continued.

They not only continued with corporate taxes; they continued with income tax cuts, and they were proud of it. They were proud of cutting income taxes as well. Now they're thinking maybe it's time to raise them again. So while they cut provincial individual taxes—and they did that with glee, with a big smile, saying how happy they were that people got a tax cut—now they're saying, "We might have to increase them again."

They have come to the conclusion that continuing with the corporate tax cuts might not be the way to go. But

we're not certain of that, because for the last couple of years—we think there's still a desire to continue to do that, but I think a lot of the Liberals have become nervous, and, hopefully, they will not continue to do that.

The idea of cutting corporate taxes as the magic solution to creating jobs is, in my mind, an error, an egregious error that would take billions and billions of dollars out of provincial coffers, that we desperately need.

We argue that there is absolutely no evidence that cutting corporate taxes is going to create jobs—absolutely no evidence whatsoever. So when you folks talk about that as your magic proposal for creating jobs—I think you've got to modernize your policies a little bit, just a tad.

The whole idea of attacking the College of Trades, and your whole idea of simply reducing ratios as a way of magically creating 230,000—again, it's fanciful and lacking in any evidence whatsoever.

I wanted to repeat that for the record, because it's useful to do.

This bill moves in the right direction. It doesn't solve the settlement issues, as I said. It doesn't deal with that, and it should. It doesn't solve the ongoing problem of bringing immigrants into the province without providing the supports they desperately need so that they can practise with the professions that they brought, that they desperately want to practise in this province. It doesn't solve any of that either, and we should be looking at that.

I think, on the whole, it is something that we—this bill, it is something. This bill moves in the right direction, and I believe that we can make it stronger. Sending it to committee would allow people to come, give their professional opinion and find ways to strengthen some of these measures that are brought forward to the table.

With that, Speaker, I say thank you.

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

Hon. John Milloy: I'm pleased to comment on the honourable member's speech that I think we all listened to with great interest. I want to thank him for some positive comments he made about the bill itself. I certainly agree with him that it would be great if we had a relatively quick debate here at second reading and were able to send this off to committee for further study.

This is really about a start, or another step, if I can put it that way, in terms of the evolving immigration story here in the province of Ontario. As speakers have already noted this morning, we of course are within Canada. Canada is a magnet for newcomers from around the world. Within Canada, Ontario is one of the key players in terms of attracting newcomers.

My own community of Waterloo region—many, when they think of Ontario, think of Toronto as the main magnet, but in fact there are a number of communities such as Waterloo region—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: No, it's Ottawa.

Hon. John Milloy: —and Ottawa and other areas that can boast a large number of newcomers.

It is crucial that we get this right. It's crucial because, obviously, we want to maintain our history and tradition of being a welcoming society, but it's also the fact that a strong newcomer base adds to the economy, adds to our growth. We are in a situation where so much of our internal growth, which is key to progress on all fronts, is because of newcomers.

I'm very pleased with this piece of legislation. It's another important step in making sure that Ontario has a proper framework to welcome newcomers. I welcome the positive remarks of the members and in my colleague from the New Democrats' speech today, supporting the intent of the legislation. I agree with him 100%: It would be great, after preliminary debate, to get this to committee for some further study.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 161 in a brief period of comments. I want to thank the member from Trinity–Spadina for raising his comments, and, as well, the government House leader for raising his.

0950

Obviously, to follow in the same spirit as the government House leader, I say this as somebody who represents a riding within the city of Ottawa—one of the fastest-growing communities in all of Canada, in the nation's capital, where people are coming not only from the rest of the country but from around the world. That is the changing and important face of Ontario.

I, myself, was a newcomer at one time to this province, coming from Nova Scotia. This was a place—and I will say this, Speaker—that people dreamed to come to. They knew that you could get a job, you could raise your family, buy a home, and you could retire securely here. Things have changed within our economy; however, we still boast a wonderful province that is beautiful and ideal for many people to settle in, so I would certainly encourage people from around the world and from the rest of Canada to consider making Ontario their home for the opportunities which we believe, in our party, we can once again restore and bring back.

That said, I think it's important that this assembly does debate a newcomer strategy, particularly for those who come from very far places. I also had the profound opportunity to spend some time travelling and talking with the other member about what it means to be an Ontarian and a Canadian. We sang together and we worked together, and, I must say, he knows what it means to be an Ontarian; he knows what it means to be a Canadian.

I will finish with this, my favourite quote from Sir John A Macdonald: "Let us be English, or let us be French, but ... above all, let us be Canadians."

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

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's always a pleasure to hear my benchmate, the member from Trinity–Spadina, speak about anything, quite frankly. He's one of, I think, admittedly, the most eloquent members of this House.

Of course we're supporting this bill, and we've said so. I think real work needs to be done on actually using and utilizing the skills that our immigrants bring, because that's not happening. Just very quickly, I'll tell you the story of someone who moved to my riding, a surgeon from another country—totally trained in his own country—and, after all, the human body is not that different. He came over here and he was told by the professional association here that it would take him 10 years to qualify. This gentleman was already in his early 40s; he didn't have 10 years to requalify. So what does he do now? He goes back to his home country and works for six months, his family stays here, and he comes over here for six months.

Meanwhile, half of my riding is looking for a general practitioner, a family doctor. It's very, very difficult in this province to find a family doctor. We don't have enough doctors. Here is somebody trained and yet cannot work in his profession and would have to spend 10 years. That's not an uncommon story. We have, of course, many immigrants who are trained that are driving taxis and working for minimum wage. Again, that's a complete waste of human talent; a complete waste of resources.

I had another resident complain to me that he couldn't find people with the necessary skills. There's a real gap between the necessary skills and what we're training our students to do, and there's a real gap between the skills we have that we're not utilizing in our immigrants. There's a problem—a big one—and I think the member alluded to that.

Yes, this bill is a first step—finally, after 11 years in office, the first bill on immigration. That's kind of sad, I think, but here we have it. Let's go with it and let's make it even stronger.

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

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to this act. I'm glad to hear that we have support in terms of moving forward with this. I speak on behalf of this not only as the former parliamentary assistant to the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration but also as someone whose parents did come to this country, to this province, for a better life for their children and their families—a fact, I may add, that continues to this day.

When I was parliamentary assistant, I did the round tables, much of which information is reflected in this immigration act, in this act that we're bringing forward. Much of the discussion that we had with the individuals that we met with—these were people that had come here from other countries with various agencies—was about the challenge that we were having here in Ontario with respect to our economic immigrants. Part of that isn't that people don't want to come to Ontario; it's not that, as the party opposite would say, they're coming here and then leaving. In fact, Ontario has a retention rate of 93% of individuals that come to Ontario: the highest across the country. Some 93% of people that come to this province

stay in this province. They stay here and they want to succeed and they do succeed.

What we should talk about are some of the changes that have occurred over the last number of years in terms of the federal programs and the impact that it had in Ontario. One of the things that we spoke about when I was doing the round table was the elimination of the backlog that the federal government went through of 200,000 skilled immigrants who had been waiting to come to Ontario. With the flick of a pen, the federal government stated, "No, we're not even going to process those 200,000 applicants. We're not going to look at them"—and are spending more time ensuring that the provincial nominee programs are increased for other provinces. We need to work with our federal government. They establish the numbers; they establish the targets for the different provinces. Over the last 10 years, the proportion of economic immigrants to Ontario has gone from 64% down to 50%. So again, I rise and speak to the importance of our newcomers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Trinity-Spadina has two minutes.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: I do understand the points raised by the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I think that we will be able to—we will, we can, we should—lobby hard. Other provinces have gotten better deals over the years. Even though they control this, we need to fight for the same kind of privileges that not only Quebec has fought for since 1978, but the same privileges the other provinces did. So even though they have primacy over this affair, we can and should fight for the same kind of deals everybody else did, and I'm sure we're going to get it.

I agree with the comments made by the member from Nepean-Carleton when she talks about the fact that we're all Canadians. She's absolutely right. This is the best country in the world, where immigrants can feel so much at home—which doesn't happen in many parts of Europe, but it happens here. But there are incredible challenges for the immigrants today that we didn't face in the 1950s and 1960s in the same way. In the 1960s, my father could buy a house for \$14,000. Today, an immigrant won't be able to afford to buy a home in Toronto for less than \$800,000. It's just not possible. The challenges are immense. So if they can't find work in their professions, they are in trouble. To the extent that we can bring them here, it is good, but to the extent that we can make sure that they get better-paying jobs, that is the answer to the problem of immigration. That is something we desperately have to work on, but maximizing the potential of use of temporary foreign workers is not the answer for me. We bring in close to 500,000 of them. We exploit them. Let's bring them in as immigrants who will become Canadians. That's the answer; not temporary foreign workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Much to the chagrin of the government, it seems that I'm standing to speak today,

because I was certainly expecting that in the normal rotation here, the government would have appointed a member of the caucus to speak to the bill. Speaking of which, maybe there just aren't enough members of the government here today for one of them to have actually paid attention to what's going on here today. Probably a lot of them are suffering from "I'm not in the cabinet" syndrome this morning and have decided to either come late or not show up at all.

At the outset, I think our critic, Todd Smith, who has done a tremendous job on this file, has indicated that we will be supporting this piece of legislation. In fact, there are many good things—we may not support everything in it, and we'll be looking to get this bill into committee so that we can hear some of the comments from other people who do not occupy this chamber but do occupy the real world and may want to make their submissions to the committee and thereby the Legislature as a whole with how this bill might be improved. That is part of the process that we go through here with this and every other piece of legislation.

As I said, this is something that, in fact, we've talked about for years: that as Ontario changes, as in fact Canada changes, we need to have an immigration bill that addresses our needs in Ontario and matches the skills that are needed with the skills that are being brought from immigrants from around the world.

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My colleague from Trinity–Spadina so aptly pointed out, as he usually does—when he's not lambasting Tories, he actually says some things that make a lot of sense sometimes, and one of the things that he talked about is that you really have to have your act together. If you're going to be offering placements for immigrants, you have to be able to answer the question, "What is there for me when I get there?" If your economy is one that—you know what the Liberals have done to this economy.

The way the previous government left the economy might have been an ideal time to have this kind of law in place, because we were creating jobs; in fact, in an eight-year period, the previous government created 1,088,000 new jobs in the province of Ontario, and that was a tremendous benefit not only to the people who are permanent residents of Canada and who were born here but to those immigrants from around the world that saw Ontario and Canada as indeed a place of opportunity.

Hon. David Zimmer: What?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I say to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs—he has joined the debate here, or at least he's showing up for work; he doesn't want to get docked in pay, I guess. Maybe they do what we were going to do, and that's if cabinet ministers don't show up for work, they're going to get their pay docked. So, good to see you here this morning. We don't want to hear a lot from you; we just want to see you.

If the minister would recall—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Point of order—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Mr. Speaker, we have heard repeated references to the presence or absence of members, and that is not in keeping with the standards of this House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I hear your point. He didn't point out anyone in particular, but he did welcome the minister this morning. I don't really think that's a reference of him not being here.

But I do know the minister didn't acknowledge the Chair when he came in.

Hon. David Zimmer: My apologies.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

So continue.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm glad that the new official whip of the government is on his toes this morning and in attendance as well, and that he pointed that out to you, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate the member for Mississauga–Streetsville on being appointed whip for the government caucus today. We'll probably be spending more time together now. In my job as the chief whip of the official opposition, Mr. Delaney and I will have more dialogue than we've ever had. I am so much looking forward to it.

Speaker, what I was saying to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs before he interrupted me and we got off on this discourse, you and I—and I'm glad that he finally did recognize the Chair—Ontario was actually once called "the province of opportunity." For those of us who are old enough to have been around before the 1973 licence plates came out—that used to be on the licence plate in Ontario: "Province of opportunity."

Those skilled workers that come from other nations today have to ask themselves, "Is this still the province of opportunity, or should this be called now the province where I must languish while I wait and hope and pray that somehow there will be a job here that matches the skills that I have brought with me?" I would say that that's a bit discouraging for immigrants today.

Immigration has changed too. At one time, almost all the immigrants that came to Canada would have come to cities like Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver, our three major cities. I think it's reflected in the communities within those communities that are culturally similar. In all of our large cities, there will be enclaves of people who shared a particular culture and felt very comfortable in settling in a particular area in that community because, while they wanted to be here in Canada and be Canadians, they also felt extremely comfortable being around people who came from a similar cultural background. Hence all the colloquialisms like Chinatown, Greektown on the Danforth, and different parts of Toronto—that kind of thing. People felt very comfortable in those respects.

But it has changed. And you have to ask yourself, is it the immigrants who are changing it, or is it the lack of opportunities? If you look at immigration today, on a percentage basis, the number of immigrants coming to Ontario is actually dropping. They're going to other medium-sized, smaller cities and stuff like that across Canada because they are going where the work is. And

that's not just immigrants. How many people have sons or daughters or nephews or nieces or cousins—and I'm talking about people who sit in this Legislature, who now know that their son or their daughter or granddaughter or grandson, a relation of some kind, has gone to Alberta or Saskatchewan to find work.

Mr. Rob E. Milligan: My cousin is in Calgary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: My friend from Northumberland–Quinte West says his cousin is in Calgary.

As families, we want our children to have work, but do we want them to be farther and farther away from us to find that work?

So the question remains: What are we doing to create those opportunities here in the province of Ontario?

Under this government, if you're not getting a job with the government, you're probably not getting a job, because the only jobs they seem to be creating in this province are ones that are on the public service payroll.

Manufacturing jobs have left the province in droves. I met with some folks last night, and they're looking at the cost of doing business in Ontario. They're looking at the cost of hydro. They're looking at the taxation. They're looking at all of the things that incrementally add up to the sum of the cost of doing business across Ontario. They're saying, "Wow," but this is getting scary and there seems to be no willingness on the part of the government to change direction.

We hear from Premier Wynne that she's going to continue going down this road, which, from a fiscal point of view, gets us into more dangerous territory every day, in terms of our ability to recover. It only stands to reason: The deeper you're in a hole, the farther you have to climb out. That's what she is doing to Ontario today.

If we're going to offer opportunities to our immigrants, we have to get our house in order, right here. When those people come here, we want them to be able to find work in the field that they were trained in, within a reasonable length of time. We don't want doctors driving taxicabs. Some of them might be real good drivers, and they might get to know the city real well, and they certainly are good conversationalists, and they might even be able to help me with something if I'm in the back seat of that cab, with respect to asking a medical question. But they shouldn't be practising medicine while behind the wheel of a Toyota Camry or a Ford Taurus. They should be doing that in a hospital or in a doctor's office. We have to ask ourselves why.

I believe that part of the problem is that some of these people are misled when they're being helped to get over here. There are unscrupulous people in other countries, too, who sell people a bill of goods and say, "When you get to Canada, they're going to have some work for you. They've got work for everybody"—da, da, da. So they spend a lot of their money in order to get here, maybe all of their money, and when they get here, it doesn't pan out. That was a common practice in the past, and to some degree it still exists, and that is regrettable.

I want to comment again on what a great job my colleague Todd Smith did. He has been our point man on immigration and culture.

Just a couple of points that Todd made when he was speaking earlier: Approximately 51% of immigration to Ontario falls into the economic immigration category, and that is the lowest of any Canadian province. The national average for economic immigration across Canada is approximately 70%. So if it's 51% who are coming for economic reasons, what is the other 48% or 49%—not even 48%; it was 51%. So where is the other 49% going? A good question, isn't it, Speaker? Our numbers should be at least as high as any other province.

1010

If this is in fact the province of opportunity, where people used to come because this was where they were going to build a new life, a successful life, a life that they could support their family on, well, most people expect that to be a job—a steady, good-paying job that pays the bills. If we're down to 51%, we're not offering a whole lot of hope to 49% of the immigrants who come to Ontario. We have to do a better job of that.

I commend the minister, Mr. Coteau, for bringing forth this legislation. Having more control over immigration is something that we have spoken about in the past. It is something that Quebec has enjoyed for some time, but Quebec seems to have always been able to extract a better deal out of the federal government than any other province, and will probably continue to do so because they play the separation card and play it extremely well.

Having said that, we're not interested in separation in Ontario. We're interested in integration. We're interested in leadership. We're interested in making Canada the strongest federation that it can possibly be, and one of the things that makes your federation stronger is strong immigration policy—good, sound, workable immigration policy. That's what we want to have here in the province of Ontario.

This is something that we did in fact promote in the past. That was an immigration policy for the province of Ontario that gave us more input. We had more input. We had more autonomy in what we would use to attract immigrants and how we would match the immigrants with the needs of the province, so that, when they did come here, the odds of being able to find a good-paying job went up considerably. If you're not matching the immigrants, you're just throwing a pile of stuff at the problem and hoping that somehow, within that group of people—that cadre of folks who come over—you'll find the ones to fill the holes and gaps that you have here in the province of Ontario.

But that's kind of a hit-and-miss proposition. Being able to say, "We need to be able to target the needs with the available roster of immigrants to fill those needs"—if we can match that up in a better way, obviously we can probably improve those kinds of numbers. We can maybe go from 51% and start to climb.

That'd be a great start, but we still have to fix the fundamental problem. We still have to fix the funda-

mental problem that sees our economy shrinking from the point of view of the percentage of the Canadian economy. The percentage of the Canadian economy in Ontario is dropping. It's shrinking. We were the economic engine. We led the country. We always led the country.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Quote your sources.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The new whip says, "Quote your sources." I'll let him do the research. He loves to research. It doesn't matter if it's about Ontario, Canada, the earth, or even some other planet; he loves to do research, and maybe he can find some sources on that one there.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Interplanetary.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, if the minister wants to, in a two-minute hit—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Well, the Speaker would like the conversation to go through him, not through each other. Thank you.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Speaker.

If the member wants to challenge anything I've said, he is welcome to do that in his two-minute hit. If he's got some numbers that he believes can challenge mine, have at it, but everyone understands and knows that Ontario's economy as a percentage of Canada's was higher in the past than it is today.

We've seen growth in other provinces: the economies of the west, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The economy of Newfoundland has grown. On a per-capita percentage basis, ours has not.

Interjection: We're a have-not province.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We're now a have-not province. If what I'm saying was not true, I say to Mr. Delaney, we wouldn't be a have-not province. Under your leadership and your party's leadership, for the first time since Confederation and for the first time since equalization payments have been brought in in this country, Ontario is a recipient of those payments—under your leadership.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We'll end it on that lovely note, since it's 10:15. This House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

WEARING OF RIBBONS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oak Ridges–Markham on a point of order.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a point of order. I believe that you will find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear purple ribbons in recognition of Epilepsy Ontario Purple Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Oak Ridges–Markham is seeking unanimous consent to wear the purple ribbon. Do we agree? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Christine Elliott: I'd like to welcome two guests from Epilepsy Ontario who are here for Purple Day: Rozalyn Werner-Arcé, the executive director, and Suzanne Nurse, the epilepsy information specialist. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, of course, the Ontario Waterpower Association is headquartered in the great community of Peterborough. I want to introduce some members in the east gallery today: Paul Norris, who is the president of the Ontario Waterpower Association, and Valerie Helbronner, who is the chair of the Ontario Waterpower Association.

In the public gallery, associated with the Ontario Waterpower Association and their advisers, are Stephanie Landers, Paul Young, Zachary Vorvis, Marc Mantha, Bob Allen, John Wynsma, Adam Chamberlain, Frank Perri, Karen McGhee and Bill Touzel.

I also have the honour of introducing some people in the members' east gallery today from Hill and Knowlton, one of the great GR firms in Ontario and Canada today. They are two people who monitor question period. I'd like to welcome Genna Schnurbach and Miriam Sherkey, who are with us today in the members' east gallery from Hill and Knowlton.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to introduce Sarah Devries in the gallery today. She's the proud mom of page captain Calvin Devries, from the great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Hon. Michael Chan: I would like to welcome the returning Olympians and Paralympians from the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. They will be attending the Lieutenant Governor's reception in their honour this evening. I would like to invite all MPPs in the House to join us at the reception tonight.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I feel special, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for recognizing me.

It is my pleasure to introduce, from Epilepsy Ontario, Rozalyn Werner-Arcé, who is their executive director, as well as Suzanne Nurse, who is the epilepsy information specialist.

We also have in the west gallery residents of York region's Alternative Community Living Program. They include Heather Osborne, Helen Fostaty, Evelyn Tilley, Norma Thornton, Doris Carmichael, Carol Langdon and Henri Latrielle. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Mario Sergio: I have the greatest pleasure of introducing my new seatmate: the newly minted Minister of Labour, Kevin Flynn.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my pleasure to introduce the family of page Eli Park, from Parkdale–High Park: his mother, Joanne Oxley; his father, John Park; his cousin Winnie Beven, his cousin Brian Beven, his cousin Marisa d'Ambrosio and his cousin Luigi d'Ambrosio. They will be making their way shortly.

Hon. David Zimmer: It's my pleasure to introduce the following executives from the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association: Dong Hun Lee, the chair of the board of directors; Don Cha, the general manager; and Ted Kim, who is also with the association. Welcome.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to welcome a group of injured workers from the Niagara region today: Richard Prudhomme, Willy Noiles, Randy Bezo, Bob Niven, Chester Marczewski, and Pat Rosano. They're here today to speak to me about proposed changes to the WSIB and the current failures in the system to protect and support injured workers. I want to thank them for being here today to speak with me.

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to extend a special welcome to seniors and people with disabilities who have made their way to Queen's Park today. There will be more than 100. They're trying to get into the galleries. They've come down on three buses, and they're here to hear the Premier's responses to some questions that will be placed today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will remind all members that my request has been that you introduce your guests, and you may give a title or who they are, and that's it.

Mr. Rick Bartolucci: I want to welcome the new Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Bill Mauro, and say how proud all northerners are.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm proud to introduce Brooks Harvey to the Legislature today. Brooks will be spending the day with me here at Queen's Park.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I think it's more of a point of order. I just wanted to thank everybody who took the time to wear purple today in honour of Epilepsy Ontario Purple Day at Queen's Park. It's very much appreciated. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It wasn't an introduction. It would have been classified as a point of order, and then I would have ruled it wasn't a point of order.

We have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Parliament of Finland. They are members of Parliament who sit on the subcommittee for municipal and health affairs. Please join me in warmly welcoming our guests from Finland.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka: a point of order or an introduction?

Mr. Norm Miller: An introduction.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): An introduction from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

Mr. Norm Miller: I want to introduce Jane Twinney, who is a candidate for the riding of Newmarket–Aurora. She is a former councillor for the Newmarket area. She's here in the west members' gallery to watch the proceedings this morning.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Frank Klees: My question is to the Premier. The Premier will note that the galleries are filling with people from York region. They are seniors; they are people with disabilities. They're on their way in, and they're being joined by a number of personal support workers. These are seniors who are receiving on-site, 24/7 personal care through York region's Alternative Community Living Program.

My question to the Premier is this. Folks are listening. They would like to know from the Premier herself: Why has the Ministry of Health disqualified the region of York from continuing to provide the essential alternative community living services on which they depend?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I welcome everyone to Queen's Park who is concerned about this issue, because we have made a commitment, as government, to ensuring that our seniors are getting the right care at the right place in the right time period. That includes homemaking, security checks and care coordination.

Here's my understanding of what has happened. I'm happy to have this discussion with the member opposite. I understand that the region of York recently made a business decision not to provide assisted living services to both high-risk and low-risk seniors. However, the Central Local Health Integration Network is ensuring that every patient currently receiving assisted living services will continue to do so. In fact, that care will be continuous, although it's being delivered through the local health integration network. That's my understanding of what's happening.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: The Premier does not have a good understanding of what happened. These people did not make their way here today to hear the Premier tell them half-truths. It is disrespectful of the Premier to even—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Frank Klees: Withdraw.

It is disrespectful of the Premier to even attempt to represent that what is a cut in service to seniors and people with disabilities is somehow the fault of York region. Here is the truth: The truth is that Ministry of Health policy disqualified York region from continuing to provide that service. And here is the result: Mohammad Asifuddin is 70 years old. He's blind, he is a double leg amputee, he's a diabetic and he has recently undergone cancer treatment. His services are being cancelled. He is being asked to actually pay for additional services. I want to ask the Premier: What's her response to that?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, you know, I think what is responsible is that people have all the information, and so to scaremonger and to suggest that somehow service is not going to be provided is not appropriate. Currently, the patients of the region of York's assisted community living program are being transferred to experienced providers who will be able to provide the enhanced care offered through the new policy. As of April 1, the new providers will be offering 24-hour, 7-day a week on-site care at all the region of York buildings where this service was previously provided. There is a change in the delivery. But to suggest that the care is not going to be provided is absolutely not accurate and, in fact, what is happening is that the care will be continued and will be enhanced.

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

Mr. Frank Klees: Here is the accurate representation—and I'm sorry that the Premier has to read from her speaking notes that someone wrote for her that are inaccurate. Here are the facts: Last week, CHATS told Mr. Asifuddin that because he needs two people to help him with his lift and sling, he will have to pay for the extra person at the rate of \$20 an hour. At the end of the day, it will cost this man \$3,000 a month to have the same service he had before. And the lift that was provided under the previous service is being dismantled and he will have to pay to have it reinstalled, at a cost of more than \$3,000.

I'm going to ask the Premier this: Is that what she considers a continuation of service? That is a disgrace. It is immoral. I will ask you now to stop it and to restore—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Indeed I was reading from notes, because I wanted to make sure I was giving accurate information. We are ensuring that people who are receiving assisted living support will have that support continued. I will absolutely have a conversation with the Minister of Health. I will talk to her about this issue to make sure that we have absolutely all the information.

But we are in the business of increasing care to seniors. We are in the business of increasing care in the community, making sure that people get the supports that they need where they are living and in a timely way. That is the work that we are doing. Those are the investments that we have been making. If there are specific issues and specific cases that the member opposite would like to bring us information on, we're happy to look into those. But we are providing that continuum of care. The region of York made a business decision. The local health integration network is continuing that service.

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Frank Klees: I want to follow through on this same question. The reason is—to the Premier—that the facts that she has—

Interjection.

Mr. Frank Klees: Don't be telling me the facts are wrong. Enough carping from you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Frank Klees: I know exactly what the facts are.

Interjection.

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

First, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, come to order.

Second, direct your comments to me.

Mr. Frank Klees: Speaker, I'm happy to direct the comments to you, and I'm hoping the Premier is listening, as well as her colleagues.

The fact of the matter is, we are speaking here about people's lives. We're talking about the most vulnerable in our communities. We're talking about seniors and people with disabilities who depend on these services to live a relatively independent life. This government is taking that away from them.

I want the Premier to stand up and stop reading from her speaking notes and speak from the heart and tell us that she will do what needs to be done to restore the ACL on-site independent service.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: There are 1.2 billion ways.

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

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will say to the member opposite that we are absolutely and fundamentally committed to providing the services that seniors and people with disabilities need, in a timely way and in their homes. That means that there will be changes in the way services are delivered, Mr. Speaker. But I don't think it's responsible to undermine decisions made by the region of York, to undermine decisions made by the local health integration network, to undermine decisions made by the health providers in York region.

We are working with communities. We are funding increased care to make sure that seniors living in York region and across the province get the care they need in their homes, in the community, when they need it. That's what our investments are about. Quite contrary to the party opposite, we are not going to slash those services. That's the policy of the party opposite.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Frank Klees: Well, Speaker, I believe the Premier should undermine those decisions made by the region of York, should undermine the decisions made by the LHIN, because those decisions are wrong. Those decisions undermine the quality of life of the seniors and people with disabilities in our province.

It is the Premier's responsibility to show some leadership. Just because some other organization makes the wrong decisions doesn't mean that she should support them. In doing so, what this Premier is saying to people

in our province, to seniors, to people with disabilities is, “We don’t respect what you’ve done for our province.”

What the Premier should be doing is standing up and saying, “We will cancel whatever wrong decisions have been made. We’ll make it right. We’ll restore those services.” She should stand up and say that today.

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, it may be in the best interests of the member opposite to undermine decisions made by local bodies like the region, like the local health integration network. He may have his own political reasons for wanting to do that, but that’s not how we function.

We want to work with local authorities, we want to work with municipal government, we want to work with the local health integration networks, because those are the people on the ground who know the services that are needed in their communities, Mr. Speaker.

I care deeply about providing services to people in this province. I care deeply about making sure that seniors have the supports they need. They have earned them. They have made this province strong throughout their lives, and we have an obligation to make sure that they get the supports they need. That is why we are investing hundreds of millions of dollars into their care and working with the local authorities to make sure they get the care that they need, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Mr. Frank Klees: The people in the galleries who are being affected by this wrong-headed decision are not giving an ovation to the Premier. The only people who are are the people who are trying to defend the indefensible.

The fact of the matter is that wrong decisions have been made. There is time to fix it. We’re appealing to the Premier to do exactly that.

It is the ministry’s policy that has directed the region to do what they’re doing. It is the ministry’s policy that has directed the LHINs to do what they’re doing. It is the Premier’s responsibility to set that right.

1050

One more time, to the Premier: Will you stand up and will you say that you will stand with these seniors and people with disabilities, and you will set right what has been done wrong, that you will restore those services to the people who are here and who depend on those services for their independence, for their safety, and for their health?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The people in the gallery are exactly the people with whom I stand. What I say to them is that we are working very hard to make sure that you get the support that you need. I know that there may be a change happening, and what we are trying to do is to make sure that people get the 24-hour, seven-day-a-week care that they need. There is a change that is being made, but our intention is—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Stop the clock. I apologize for not catching this earlier. Direct your questions, comments and answers to me.

New question.

JOB CREATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, 162 families in Welland received devastating news that they will be laid off, as Energex Tube has decided to idle its operations. Like many families across this province, they will be looking for work this spring and wondering whether or not they’re going to find any.

Over the past week, the Premier insisted that the Liberal status quo is working when it comes to jobs. What does she have to say to the families that have now lost their jobs in Welland this week?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say that it’s always a blow when a company makes a decision and there is job loss. My heart goes out to the workers and their families. But what I will say is that we will do everything in our power to make sure that those workers have the opportunity to make the transition to new employment and to new retraining.

Beyond that, we are working with companies who are coming into the province and we are working with companies that are expanding their job creation. That’s the work that will make the economy stronger into the future. We’re not going to stop that work. We’re going to continue that work, because it’s creating jobs, including working with communities to invest in infrastructure. But my heart goes out to the people in this particular instance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There is no doubt that manufacturers are facing challenges all over North America, but the Premier’s response ignores the problem and suggests that everything that they’re doing over there is actually working. Instead of targeted approaches to help business that are hiring people or investing here in Ontario, she’s defending loopholes and giveaways that hand millions of dollars to companies that then outsource jobs. Instead of working to get electricity rates under control, she insists that sky-high salaries, bloated agencies, and subsidized electricity exports actually make sense. Does the Premier really think that her plans are working?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have created more than 400,000 net new jobs since 2009—100,000 new jobs last year. If the leader of the third party, underneath her rhetoric, is asking me is whether we’re going to support the \$2.5-billion scheme that she would like to bring

forward, the scheme that was adopted by President Barack Obama and then rejected by President Barack Obama because it wasn't working, the scheme that in many jurisdictions has been shown to not work and to actually spread money in places where jobs were already being created in a very non-discriminatory way, if she's asking if we would take that reckless path, no, we will not. We will continue to work with businesses to do that in a targeted and strategic way, and to help them expand and create the jobs that we know are the future of this province.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, 300,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this province and have not been replaced, and the Premier well knows it. Families losing a paycheque this month deserve better from their government. Instead of a plan to help them with change that rewards actual job creation and cleans up the mess in our electricity system, they see a government that once again is focused on the challenges of the Liberal Party, scrambling to plug holes left by departing ministers and shoring up vulnerable MPPs.

Why is this government more concerned about saving the jobs of MPPs from Oakville and Thunder Bay than thousands of Ontarians losing theirs?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know the leader of the third party is pinning her hopes on her job creator tax credit scheme, but it has been discredited virtually right across North America. Barack Obama considered it; he proposed a similar 10% tax credit. But at the end of the day, he dropped it because his experts were telling him that it wouldn't work, that it would be abused, as it has been in a number of states. It had practically no effect, according to the NPR editorial they had on it. Many people in Congress and the Senate said that they should be cautious about it because, quite frankly, it doesn't work.

Our finance ministry has estimated that it would cost more than \$2.5 billion a year. In fact, the Jobs and Prosperity Council rejected it—the Jobs and Prosperity Council that had Jim Stanford, the respected economist from Unifor, as part of that committee.

I don't understand why they're pinning their hopes on a failed tax credit that is a giveaway where evidence shows that 92% of the jobs are going to be created anyway.

PAN AM GAMES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I can tell you that the status quo isn't working for hundreds of thousands of people who are underemployed and unemployed in the province of Ontario.

My question is to the Premier. People in this province are also concerned that their tax dollars aren't being respected. They were told the original cost for security

for the Pan Am Games was supposed to be \$113 million. Then the cost suddenly jumped to \$239 million.

My question is a simple one: Where is the accountability?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the leader of the third party may know, the minister offered a technical briefing for opposition members and, unfortunately, your member wasn't able to be there.

It's very important that everyone who wants to ask a question about the Pan/Parapan Am Games has all the information about the procurement process that was gone through in term of security, has all the information about the transportation costs and understands that it is our obligation to make sure that the security of the Pan/Parapan Am Games is the very best it can be to protect all of the attendees, whether they're coaches, whether they're athletes or whether they're tourists. People are going to be coming to the Pan/Parapan Am Games for this amazing event. We need to make sure the security is the best it can be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, after hearing about soaring costs, people are now learning that a US firm with a history of violations and fines here in Ontario has been awarded the Pan Am Games security contract. Was the Premier aware of the history of violations and fines before this contract was awarded?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, had the leader of the third party's colleague been able to attend the technical briefing, she would have known that for this process, we were relying on the expertise of the OPP. It has been a process that has been led by the OPP. I think the OPP inspector, Mike McDonell from the integrated security unit—I'm just going to quote him: "The government conducted a fair, open and transparent process" overseen by the Office of the Fairness Commissioner. Mike McDonell went on to say, "The contract was awarded to the firm with the strongest bid and demonstrated experience in large-scale security initiatives while meeting all the required private security parameters throughout the games."

Mr. Speaker, we are putting our faith in the experts on this file because we must be assured that the security at the Pan/Parapan Am Games is the best it can be.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What I asked the Premier about is: When did she know about the fact that this contract was being awarded to an American company that has a history of violations and fines here in Ontario? When did she know that that contract was being awarded? That was the question I asked.

In light of these revelations, will the Premier now do the right thing and call on the Auditor General to take a look at the Pan Am security contracts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: All four members of the RFP selection committee for private security services for the 2015 Pan/Parapan Am Games are members of the OPP and serve with the integrated security unit. I am not

going to interfere in that process. I am not a security expert and I don't believe the leader of the third party is a security expert. We are going to leave that to the experts because we need to make sure that everyone who comes to the Pan/Parapan Am Games—

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Glengarry–Prescott Russell will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And the member from Nepean–Carleton.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And the member from Prince Edward–Hastings; it actually could have been his warning.

New question.

1100

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the Premier. The Premier knows that the Pan Am Games are a scandal under this current minister. She requires him to report to her biweekly for lack of confidence, and she has allowed TO2015 to create a new communications nanny position to mitigate the minister's ongoing blooper reel, yet somehow the minister dodged a bullet with the latest cabinet shuffle.

When are the costs of retaining this minister too high, Premier? You just lectured the third party leader that it's important to know all the details about the Pan Am Games. Why don't you tell taxpayers—today, right now—what you're paying Neala Barton?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I spoke yesterday about the reality that the human resources hiring—the issues to do with human resources—are being handled by TO2015. The federal government, the provincial government and the municipal government are all working together, making those HR decisions. We've had a conversation about the reality that this minister is providing technical briefings and opening up the process so that the members across the way can ask all of the technical questions that they want, and can have that information.

The reality is that this is a complex, large games. There are many moving parts. The venues are spread around the region so that other communities—like Barrie, like Hamilton and across the region—will have an opportunity to have a legacy as a result of these games. I hope that the member opposite takes the opportunity to get all the information from those technical briefings.

Mr. Rod Jackson: I was happy to be at the technical briefings. Unfortunately, the minister wasn't. No doubt

the Premier knows every decision through her biweekly reports, so pleading ignorance is seriously amateur hour.

Let me help you out, Premier. Your Liberal friend Neala Barton is making more than you are. She's buying when you go to dinner, Premier, because this scandal-hopper is netting between \$250,000 and \$300,000 in taxpayer dollars. All this for Neala Barton, a Liberal staffer who's been there for eHealth, for McGuinty's and Redford's resignations, and now for Pan Am.

Premier, you can save that money by just removing the source of the problem today. Now that you know the cost of Liberal cronyism, will you intervene immediately and replace the minister and Barton?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Michael Chan: This member can, day after day, attack the games, but at committee on Monday he said that the Parapan American Games should combine with the Pan Am Games—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Northumberland–Quinte West is warned—

Mr. Rod Jackson: Read the Hansard, Minister.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —and the member for Barrie will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Clearly. Minister?

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you, Speaker. He suggested that para-athletes from all over the world—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: You should have been fired yesterday.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Read the Hansard. Get your facts straight. The least you could do is to get that right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Barrie will come to order—second time. The member for Nepean–Carleton will come to order. Maybe the third time; I'm not sure.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): But if you question my seriousness, keep going.

Hon. Michael Chan: On a day where we will be hosting Paralympic athletes, he lacks the understanding to realize that para-athletes are world-class competitors who should be celebrated—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Shame on you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Michael Chan: His comments are not only arrogant and ignorant, but aim to destroy—

Interjections.

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

The member will withdraw.

Hon. Michael Chan: I withdraw, Speaker.

These comments are misguided and aim to destroy the spirit of para-athletes all over the world who compete in sports. He owes all para-athletes an explanation for this terrible comment.

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, if you wouldn't mind getting into your seat so I can tell you to stop—but maybe I'll tell you to stop now.

New question.

PAN AM GAMES

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

Speaker, the Pan Am security contract just keeps getting worse. We're now learning that the US firm this government selected to provide security for the Pan Am Games pled guilty to violating its licence during the G20 summit and was fined \$45,000 here in Ontario. Was the Premier or her minister aware of these violations, the guilty plea and the fine before this contract was awarded?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, let me just start by saying that I'm very excited to be in my new role. I want to thank the Premier for giving me the opportunity to serve as Ontario's Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. I also very much look forward to working with my colleagues the member from Leeds–Grenville and the member from London West so that we can work together and find ways to make our province even safer and more secure for every single Ontarian.

I'm new on the file so I'm learning all the ins and outs, but I know one thing for sure, and that is that our government is developing a world-class Pan American Games for 2015 right here in our province. These games are going to be hosting world-class athletes from the Americas. They're going to be welcoming tourists from around the world. We are going to work with our security experts to make sure that these games are one of the most secure games around the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the minister for no answer again.

How can this government have even considered a bid from a security firm that has broken laws in our province specific to the provisions of our security services? There's even a question about whose bid was lower and who had saved Ontarians money. The company that you didn't pick was Ontarian.

Can the Premier or the minister explain why this government awarded the contract for the Pan/Parapan Am security to a US firm with a checkered security history that was charging more, when there were qualified firms here in Ontario with clean track records?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, the security of the games is a very serious issue, and we must rely on experts like the Ontario Provincial Police to make a decision as to what is the best form and who is the best one to deliver security. In matters of security, armchair quarterbacks are not welcome. That's not what we want to be doing. That's why we have an integrated unit at the Ontario Provincial Police that is responsible for contracting the security. They are responsible for all the details around the security. I will listen to their advice any single day over any member in this House, from the government or from the opposition.

Let the OPP do their job and make sure the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games are world-class games right here in the province of Ontario.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. I've heard the minister speaking about our government's record investments in public transit, and the people in my riding of Vaughan have certainly taken notice.

My constituents rely on GO trains and buses to get to and from work on a daily basis. They travel between school, friends, families, homes, and for a social evening downtown or in my riding. Vaughan residents recognize that public transit investments make transit a better choice for commuting. They reduce congestion on our roads and contribute to a better quality of life for all Ontario families, especially those in my riding.

1110

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you please speak to the investments in my riding that were recently announced when it comes to GO services?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's a great pleasure to rise, and I want to thank my friend the MPP for Vaughan for his advocacy and his leadership on transit. We, as you may know, recently announced the extension of a morning and an afternoon train on the Barrie line, and we will be increasing that from 10 cars to 12 cars. That will add 320 additional seats or, if you want to look at it this way, take 320 more cars off just on that one addition alone.

We will actually be adding two new weekly morning trains on the Barrie line, from Maple to Union Station, which will create more capacity. This is in addition to a plethora of other investments we are making in different forms of transit, and the subway, which is provoking great development right now in the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre.

I want to thank the member for his leadership.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the minister for the update regarding the all-important Barrie GO line. This announcement is great news for my community, for the people of Vaughan. Increased GO service has long been necessary, and I'm delighted that our government is committed to taking these important steps.

I have been and residents in my community have also been troubled to hear about the plan, or the lack thereof, that's being suggested by the opposition and by the third party. The Leader of the Opposition has suggested that he would be making the kinds of investments that would directly and adversely impact the communities of Vaughan, those across York region and elsewhere. My understanding is that his proposals would almost cease completely the infrastructure spending in communities outside of the Toronto core, like mine. And from what I've seen, the NDP has no plan at all when it comes to transit.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Transportation: Can you please outline the investments that our government is making in communities like Vaughan and across Ontario?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We have at this point invested \$9.1 billion in GO services alone, and this is important, because the investments that Metrolinx make have impacts all across the province. For my friend from Thunder Bay–Atikokan, the new Minister of Municipal Affairs, the cars are made there; and for the member for Barrie, all the tunnels for the Eglinton line are being made in Barrie, Ontario.

But it's also important to note that we're the only party committed to 2% of GDP, which is 10 times as much as the opposition party. We're still trying to figure out where the third party is on infrastructure, because their history in government is to spend 10 cents on transit for every dollar that we spend, and that doesn't buy you a bus; it merely fills a pothole.

FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. This morning, I have a large group of financial services people tuning in to carefully listen to your answer. They're not interested at this moment in what you have to say about the fall economic statement. What they're interested in is what you had to say last May during the budget announcement. Let's review.

Last spring, you were told by the Ministry of Finance you were "not on track to meet the 2012 budget deficit targets." A few days later, you issued a news release that stated, "The government is on track to meet deficit targets outlined in the 2012 budget."

Premier, why did you tell the financial community, the bond-rating agencies, this Legislature and the public one thing when you knew the complete opposite to be true?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Interjections.

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

Minister of Finance?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite seems to fail to understand that while recommendations and proposals and initiatives are put in place, while conditions change by market forces

around the world, a leadership government must take action, and as a result of the actions we've taken, we reduced spending. We took the initiatives necessary to recalibrate so that we could in fact stay on target. The bond-rating agencies and all the others that you make mention of, we do speak to as a result of those results.

As a consequence, we're on track to balance the books by 2017-18, and we do so because of the actions that we've taken to do so.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: So, Premier, conditions changed in a couple of days from when you were told one thing and said the other. You're not giving us the facts. You were told one thing, but you went out and told the public and this Legislature the complete opposite.

You've got a \$4.5-billion gap and you tell the bond-rating folks, "All is well." This is like déjà vu all over again. Last year, throughout the gas plant scandal, you told us the cancellation would cost \$40 million, but it took the Auditor General to tell us what really happened. It was \$1.1 billion. You deleted emails, and the OPP had to get called in.

There's a pattern happening here, Premier. When you get caught, you delete or, in my case last week, you try to stop information from being made public. Instead of writing a jobs plan, you spend your time keeping the facts from getting out. Exactly what is it that you're hiding?

Interjections.

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

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The members opposite have had a history of hiding the facts. That is why there was a \$5.6-billion hole in the budget when they were last in power.

We brought forward measures of transparency and accountability, to the point now where the C.D. Howe Institute and others are saying that Ontario is one of the highest-rated provinces and governments by way of transparency and disclosure and integrity in the numbers that we present. As a result of that, we've become the leanest government in Canada. We've beaten our deficit targets year over year, and we're continuing to do so. We're investing in jobs and investing in the economy, to create greater economic growth and more jobs, something that that party opposite is actually threatening.

As a result of what he has just mentioned—months-old information that we had already exposed and put out there for all to see and consume—we are taking actions to ensure that we balance the books, and we'll continue to do so.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I want to first congratulate the minister on his recent appointment and wish him well.

The minister had a private member's bill that would require 60% Canadian content for transit vehicles purchased by municipalities. My first question to the minister is very simple: Will the minister introduce this bill as his first—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm glad you brought it back to the ministry, because I would have ruled it out of order. But now that you've brought it back as to whether or not he will introduce certain legislation, it's fine, so I'll carry on.

Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, thank you very much for the question. I want to thank—the member, thank you very much for the question.

As he is aware, as a minister, I'm not able to bring private members' bills forward, but what I can tell you on a specific issue is clearly this: We have made a strong commitment—and I would thank the member opposite from North Bay. Both of us, in our previous lives and in previous times here in this Legislature, introduced private members' legislation on this particular issue. I, personally, as a northern member, find it as very important. I think it's key to part of the revitalization of the forest industry, which has already begun to occur, I would suggest. We have some great news in northwestern Ontario, certainly in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. This piece, I believe, would help that.

But I will say that paramount to us are the issues related to safety, when it comes to this particular issue. We feel like we've done some pretty good work. The previous minister has done a tremendous amount of great work, in terms of lining up that support to ensure we're meeting all of our people and stakeholders who are interested in this issue.

On a go-forward basis, there is more I will say in the supplementary. There's another important piece I feel it's necessary to share with the member.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The minister knows how important Canadian content is in mass transit vehicles for Thunder Bay's Bombardier plant. He said, "The regulations called for in the proposed bill would help protect these jobs and encourage future job growth in the mass transit sector."

With his appointment as a minister, his private member's bill has now essentially died on the order table and will not be up for debate tomorrow. My question is, will the minister commit today to making his bill for Canadian content in mass transit vehicles a government bill and a government priority?

Hon. Bill Mauro: The Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. I'm just going to provide you with some feedback. This is why we tightrope-walk when we have these changes and things that have happened the way they have.

1120

The instruction I'm going to leave with you is to try to make sure that the question you ask of the minister is directed to ministry responsibilities. I know that there was a little bit of weaving back and forth, both in the answer and in the question. I'm glad that the minister has punted it to somebody who probably has the responsibility within his particular domain.

I'm trying to offer some guidance, because it is a difficult matter, and I appreciate what the members want to say and do. I'm just offering all of us a reminder that when we do offer those kinds of questions, they're directed directly to the ministry's responsibility, and I thank you for that.

I thank the minister for giving it to the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I too want to welcome my colleague from Thunder Bay–Atikokan to cabinet. I know the Premier is very, very well aware of the new minister's views, and I'm sure that was weighed in her thinking, that Canadian content and the economic implications of our infrastructure investments are a priority for this government.

Right now, we have worked very effectively. The downside of being too protective is that we hurt Canadian companies competing in the large US market.

But right now, we go back seven years, formerly MPP Mauro as a city councillor, in his previous life, advocated—this is a seven-year campaign that my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been on, so I don't think it's going to disappear any time.

Hon. Bill Mauro: It's 1,200 jobs.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This would be 1,200 jobs.

We will continue to work with the third party and in this Legislature to realize the maximum benefit of all our infrastructure investments in each part of the—

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

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Here in Ontario, we should be proud that we have a ministry that is dedicated to providing children and youth with services and supports they need. In my community of Scarborough–Rouge River, I meet families and vulnerable youth every day. They share stories of how the work of our government is helping to make their lives better.

Speaker, doing what we can to ensure the well-being of all children and youth in the province is not only important to us now, but it will define the quality of men and women who will live in Ontario in the future. Giving a child a boost and the supports they need will lead them in the right direction and provide them opportunities to make the right decisions in life. An investment in our children and youth today is an investment in the province's future.

Can the minister tell us about the work that the ministry is doing to support children and youth in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough–Rouge River for not only the question today but also his regular and ongoing advocacy for children and youth not only in his riding but across the province. Today, for everyone to know, we're celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and we'll be having a little celebration later and some cake. Everybody is invited to join us later today.

I'm proud that our government took the initiative to create this ministry and ensure that children and youth throughout the province are properly represented. As stated by our first minister, "By focusing on positive results for kids from prenatal health through early adulthood, we have a unique opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of Ontario's young people." That statement remains valid today.

I've heard that the party opposite would abolish the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. That would be a mistake. For the past 10 years, thanks to tireless work, we've made terrific gains.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: The minister is correct. It would be wrong to abolish this ministry—despite calls from some members in this House. In Scarborough–Rouge River, there has been a reduction in crime and gang activities since 2004. I personally attribute that to the actions of this government by providing children and youth better options and greater opportunity.

From the increased supports for youth leaving care or increased investments for special needs services or the many initiatives in the poverty reduction strategy, vulnerable children and youth in my community have greatly benefited from focus by a dedicated ministry.

Speaker, the 10th anniversary of the creation of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is a milestone that we should all celebrate. As I said earlier, an investment in our children and youth today is an investment in our province's future. The best way to justify this ministry to those who think it should be abolished is by reminding them of the major accomplishments made in the past 10 years.

Speaker, can the minister tell us—

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

Hon. Teresa Piruzza: Again, thank you for the follow-up to that question. I can most certainly speak to the many accomplishments this ministry has had over the last 10 years, because they have been many.

We introduced the province's first-ever Poverty Reduction Strategy, with the Ontario children's benefit as its focal point. We transformed the child welfare system to make it sustainable and ensure that children in Ontario will be protected for generations to come. We've dramatically increased our support for crown wards, supporting the work of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group.

We've introduced a new Special Needs Strategy, a Youth Suicide Prevention Plan, a Youth Action Plan and a new mental health strategy. Since we took action in 2003, the youth crime rate has fallen by 29%. This has been a very busy ministry.

Building on our achievements, we will continue to help children and youth in Ontario reach their full potential.

SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the education minister. Minister, I delivered yet another letter today asking you why you refused to safeguard extracurricular activities for our students. You may have noticed that your teachers' collective bargaining bill sits in committee, stuck in clause-by-clause, and will stay there until you work up the courage to stand up for students.

I'll remind you again that our only ask on behalf of parents in this entire piece of legislation is to ensure that co-curricular activities are not ripped away from students, yet you continue to reject this outright. Is the threat of withdrawing support that the special interests hold over your head so strong that you cannot risk politically incurring their wrath?

Minister, you can run for election to lead a union or you can be our Minister of Education, but you can't be both.

Clean up your act, get your facts straight and support the important amendments for students and parents across this province. Will you do that today, Minister?

Hon. Liz Sandals: The answer is the same as it was last week. When I think about what happened during the Harris years, what I remember was legislation, regulation and attempts to change funding and collective agreements in order to impose new rules of work without new compensation. In fact, they took a billion dollars out of school board funding.

I also remember that what we had during the Harris years was eight years of chaos. Kids didn't get extracurriculars. They didn't even get to go to school, because people were always on strike during their time. So, am I going to do what he suggests? Absolutely not.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm still waiting to hear an answer why you could possibly reject this request outright. This is not a ploy or a tactic. This is not a game. Parents have been clear that they want their politicians to safeguard extracurricular activities come the fall. I want this, too, but I cannot do this without your help.

Minister, if this is about pride, please, I ask you, let us put our egos aside and think about what really matters: the education of our students. However, if this is about losing your political allies, please, I ask you, find the courage within yourself to stand up for what is right, rather than caving in to the special interests at the expense of the student experience in the province.

We know you were once on the side of parents. We know you can be again. Will you support this amendment and support the students of this province? For once, Minister, please stand up with us and help students get the experience they need.

Interjections.

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

Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I am absolutely on the side of parents and children and making sure that kids have extracurricular—and I know from a lot of experience that the best way to do that is when everybody works together.

I would like to point out that the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, the French public trustees and the English Catholic trustees all want this legislation passed. ETFO, the English elementary teachers; OSSTF, the English secondary teachers; OECTA, the English Catholic teachers; AEFO, the francophone teachers—they, too, want this legislation passed.

We can all work together. It's you that can't work with anybody.

1130

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. Today, busloads of seniors and caregivers from the York region are at Queen's Park. They are here because some of the most vulnerable people in the region's community living programs are about to lose the round-the-clock care that they require.

The government has been trying to put the blame on York region, saying they cannot do much, yet the Minister of Health was able to extend this in-home care by a period of one month.

Will the Premier tell the seniors and their caregivers who are here today if she is prepared to protect their health care services permanently?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm not sure exactly where the blame has come from. I'm not blaming anyone. What I'm saying is that my understanding is that the services that have been provided in one way are going to be provided in another way, that the region of York made a business decision that they were going to get out of this particular delivery, and that the local health integration network, the Central LHIN, is going to be ensuring that every patient who currently receives service will continue to receive service.

The reality is that not all seniors were receiving 24-hour, seven-day-a-week service. We want to ensure that that is in place, that they have access to that service as they need it, where they need it, and in a timely way. That's what the change is about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Let me make it clear: When it comes to frail, elderly seniors and people with disabili-

ties, 24/7 coverage by caregivers, by PSWs who know them, who know and understand their needs, is the gold standard. This is what they had.

I see it time and time again: The Liberal government can talk a good game when it comes to keeping frail, elderly, vulnerable people in their homes. They repeat "right care, right time, right places," but when cuts are being made to gold-standard programs that do just that, then their talk starts to sound like nothing more than empty words.

I ask again, is the Premier going to protect these vital, gold-standard health care services and the seniors that they support?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just repeat again: Currently, patients of the region of York's assisted community living program are being transferred to experienced providers—because I agree with the member opposite that it is important for seniors to have the care of experienced people who understand what their needs are, because if they are fragile, if they are in a precarious situation, they need to have that trained person there. They're being transferred to experienced providers who will be able to provide this service.

As of April 1, new providers will be offering that 24-hour, seven-day-a-week care on-site at all of the region of York buildings where this service was previously provided. That is what is to happen on April 1.

If there are questions about that, I will absolutely make sure that they get answered by folks in the Ministry of Health. But that's what's happening. The care is being transferred.

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Phil McNeely: This question is to the Minister of Rural Affairs. Minister, we know cities have many transit options, but in northern and rural areas, roads and bridges are what are important.

We all take notice when we drive over potholes or can't get across a bridge in disrepair. Not only are roads and bridges vital to local communities, but they serve as important arteries to help Ontario's economy grow.

Ontario's small and rural municipalities have infrastructure needs that differ greatly from the urban municipalities, and I want to be assured that this government has taken those needs into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can the minister please inform the House on what is being done to address the infrastructure concerns of rural municipalities?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Ottawa-Orléans for a very superb question this morning.

I've had the great privilege of being Minister of Rural Affairs and getting the opportunity to travel Ontario north, south, east, and west, and meeting with my municipal colleagues, who I have a great relationship with as a former municipal councillor myself for some 18 years.

When we brought forward that \$100-million infrastructure fund for small, rural, and northern municipal-

ities—I haven't seen such enthusiasm in years as when we announced that program, and AMO and ROMA—the opportunity to engage with those fine elected officials that represent communities, oh, so well.

Just recently, on my travel on that day, we announced \$1.5 million, rehabilitating a well in Hanover—Mayor Maskell is a wonderful lady—

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: —upgrading sanitary sewer services in Owen Sound. Mayor Haswell—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I stand; you sit.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, no. I stand; you sit. Don't finish.

Supplementary.

Mr. Phil McNeely: Thank you, Minister, for your response. I'm pleased to hear the Ontario government takes the needs of small and rural municipalities very seriously.

Rural Ontarians have raised concerns over stable and predictable infrastructure funding. Having been involved as a consulting engineer for over 30 years at the community level, I know first-hand the importance of predictable funding. Rural communities need a full range of public infrastructure, from roads and bridges to water supply networks, to protect their quality of life and foster new economic development. With predictable funding, municipalities can budget efficiently and develop long-term repair plans for aging infrastructure, guaranteeing the maintenance of critical infrastructure for years to come.

Can the minister update the House on what our government is doing to ensure municipalities have stable, predictable funding for infrastructure?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Again, I want to thank the member for Ottawa–Orléans for the supplementary. I'm sure he won't want a late show for later today because I'll provide a very full answer.

In rural Ontario, we've been consulting widely, and I've had great discussions with the Premier, the Minister of Finance, and my colleague the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. We're hoping to get a permanent program in the budget, whenever it's delivered in the weeks to come. I know there's great anticipation.

Minister Murray and I consulted with over 500 municipal officials, one of the widest consultations ever in the province of Ontario, because we want to get that permanent structure right. In order to get it right, you listen to municipal leaders right across the province of Ontario, and we're waiting for the budget, because it will be a good-news day, Mr. Speaker.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: My question is to the Premier. On January 29 of this year, it was announced that three teams were shortlisted to design, finance and maintain

the Milton District Hospital expansion project. These three firms are to be invited to respond to a request for proposals for the expansion project, whose start began in 2001 under a PC government. In 2002, I procured the land for the project, but after the McGuinty Liberals were elected in 2003, the expansion was cancelled.

It was only during the 2007 election that the start process was begun anew, from scratch. Then on August 25, 2011, another election year, the minister said "... this money has been allocated... It has gone through our treasury board."

Premier, your Minister of Health promised that the Milton hospital would be expanded by 2016. When will the RFP be released to the three approved consortiums?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Infrastructure is going to want to speak to the specifics of this in the supplementary, but what I will say is that it's very interesting that at the end of question period we get questions that have to do with spending dollars. At the beginning of question period from the Conservatives, all we hear about is what they are going to cut and what they are going to slash. In fact, when the Leader of the Opposition asks a question, it is always about cutting and slashing, cutting people out of jobs, not investing in infrastructure, not investing in building hospitals and schools.

Our plan is and has been to make those necessary investments. We have built hospitals. We have built schools. We have built roads. We have built transit. We are going to continue to build this province, Mr. Speaker, and they would cut it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: Apparently, the Premier didn't hear the first part of the questions from our party.

Premier, Milton has grown to three times the size that it was in 1987. The town of Milton is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Ontario. It's unacceptable that such a dynamic community as Milton should have its primary health care needs served by a hospital that has to be expanded to triple its size to serve the town.

1140

Under your government's watch, election time has become hospital funding announcement time in Ontario. As we near an election, I would like to ask you on behalf of the people of Ontario—Premier, the RFP is ready to go. It has been ready to go for two months. Why is it not released? You're playing politics with this issue.

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The member opposite is a most curious gentleman. He has provoked great curiosity in me as a minister because, for some reason, the member opposite voted against the expansion of that hospital. I'm a bit bewildered about the member's behaviour because he voted against it.

Right now we have 12 hospitals under construction, of 39 which this government has now built. The member opposite, as you know, supported a government that closed 28 hospitals—

Interjection.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to speak here.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Halton will come to order, please. The member from Burlington will come to order.

Wrap up, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: When you close 28 hospitals, and you're criticizing a government that's building 39, there is a word for it. "Politics" might be a polite word for when you vote against your own hospital and then support it. There are some unparliamentary—

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

WINTER HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

Mr. John Vanthof: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Lack of winter road maintenance across Ontario has caused havoc on Ontario's highways for many winters. Some 76% of people in a recent poll agreed; even the minister has said that privatization of snow removal probably needs a rethink.

In the meantime, contractors have been sounding alarm bells that the ministry hasn't been issuing enough funding to clear the highways properly. So the ministry is issuing fines, yet the minister has refused to release the amount of the fines.

What's holding the ministry back? Release the amounts of the fines, where they're fined and when they're fined. Let's see: Is it the contractors or is it the ministry that is responsible for terrible snow removal in this province?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Our greatest concern—and, I'm sure, that of our contractors—is the safety of our roads. We have worked very carefully and closely with our contractors to maintain those high standards. We added almost \$10 million in northern Ontario alone so that those contractors could put 50 vehicles out.

The member opposite is quite right: Those contracts are now all outsourced, out of the ideological zeal of a previous government that thought that the private sector did everything better. Those standards have not changed.

The member has read in the media, as I have, that there are penalties when contractors don't meet those standards. We will not compromise the public's safety, and we insist. That being said, most of our contractors are meeting those standards, and we look forward to working with them.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to rise on a point of order to clarify the question from the member from Essex. You stated that the question of the member from Essex should not have been directed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs when, in fact, the private member's bill referenced places requirements on municipalities when purchasing mass transit vehicles. I'd like to provide you with a copy of this bill for your reference.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for the point of order, and I will try to provide some clarity. The concern I was trying to express was that of a reference of a private member's bill to the minister, and that the ministry, at that point—and anyone in cabinet—has the right to give it to the ministry that they require to get it to, to provide an answer.

That said, it was a judgment call that I made, that I thought it might not be germane to the ministry. I confess that I was more concerned with the fact that it was a private member's bill that was being referenced, and that it was not to be spoken to through cabinet, because cabinet doesn't have any jurisdiction over private members' bills.

I hope that's clearer than what I tried to talk about last time.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to get a moment without a heckle.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, I'm in the right business. You're the ones who know how to do that. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

VISITOR

Hon. David Zimmer: Earlier, Speaker, I neglected to introduce Yang Kon Kim, who is the vice-president of the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome all of our guests.

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

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my pleasure to rise today on behalf of the residents in Nepean–Carleton to talk of a little boy I had the pleasure of meeting last Friday. His name is Kaiden. Last week, I met with his mother, Helen, who runs a program called Kaiden's Care Kits.

Kaiden is pretty interesting. He's four and a half years old and he has cystic fibrosis. Kaiden's mother, when she

found out that Kaiden had cystic fibrosis, decided she was going to take the effort upon herself to make sure that other children born with CF would receive care kits on what to do when mom and dad find out in the early days after a child's birth that they have CF.

Helen was quite amazing, but I was really impressed with Kaiden. He came in and he was full of life. You wouldn't know that Kaiden was sick with cystic fibrosis. He was vibrant, full of life. He was playing. He reminds me of every little kid I get to meet that plays with my little girl, Victoria.

Kaiden's mom came in to see me because of an issue that's been raised here frequently at Queen's Park, the funding for Kalydeco, so that he will have a normal life as he grows up, or as normal as possible. I stand here today to add my voice with our deputy leader, Christine Elliott, with my colleague, a former health minister, Jim Wilson, and with long-time MPP Ted Arnott, to say that it's time that the government of Ontario thought really long and hard on how they can actually start to fund this drug. I want to make sure that kids like Kaiden in Ontario have the hope to live as healthily as they possibly can.

And to Kaiden: I know you're at home watching. Everybody here at the Legislature says hello.

KINGSVILLE FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to rise today to promote and to invite Ontarians from across the province to the first-ever Kingsville Folk Music Festival. With the town of Kingsville as the official partner, the festival will take place between August 8 and 10 at Lakeside Park, at 315 Queen St., in beautiful Kingsville, Ontario, nestled on the north shore of Lake Erie. With its rich musical history and historic pavilion, Lakeside Park could be one of the most picturesque festival sites in Canada.

The Kingsville Folk Music Festival is the first event of its kind to be held west of London in southwestern Ontario, and with five stages and over 30 national and international performers, the festival is modelled after the most successful and longest running Canadian music festivals in Edmonton, Vancouver, Winnipeg, and the Stan Rogers Folk Festival. With musical talents like Bruce Cockburn, David Francey, Fred Penner, Ron Hynes, J.P. Cormier, Valdy and Jane Siberry, they certainly have an exhaustive list of talents that will be there.

Founded in 2012 by John and Michele Law and incorporated as an Ontario non-profit, the Sun Parlour Folk Music Society exists to promote the live performances of folk music in our region.

I want to congratulate the organizers of this greatly anticipated event. They are Marjan Willett, Michelle Fortier, Sharon Stasso, Bonnie Hyatt, Tom Taylor, Lillian Wauthier, Michele and John Law and Tina Wells.

It's going to be a wonderful time in Kingsville during the folk festival, and I invite everyone to come down to the region and enjoy folk music in southwestern Ontario.

BANGLADESH INDEPENDENCE DAY

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I'm pleased to rise in the House today in recognition of March 26 as Bangladesh Independence Day. I also want to recognize the tremendous contributions by the Bangladeshi Canadian community.

The Bengali community has a strong presence in many communities, but especially in my own riding of Scarborough–Guildwood. I had the opportunity to join the Bengali Social Club of Scarborough for an event at Scarborough Village not so long ago, and I was impressed with the families and their commitment to building a strong and vibrant community in Scarborough.

I can tell you that the community is a vibrant one and contributes greatly, not only to the diversity and success of my community, but across Ontario.

Today, I hope my colleagues will join me in recognizing the Independence Day of Bangladesh, and join with the Bangladeshi community in celebrating this very special day.

TEACHERS

Mr. Rob Leone: The 2014 Loving to Learn contest wrapped up recently in Waterloo region, and it asked a very important question: What makes a teacher a really great teacher?

If you'd allow me, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share the story of Audrey Guo of Northlake Woods Public School in Waterloo, who told the story of her relationship with her teacher, Margo Foster-Cohen. Audrey says:

"Mrs. Cohen has the power to understand children as if she's a child as well. She's so kind and funny, you'll start warming up to her like a ... friend that you've known for a long time."

I'm pleased to report that Guo was declared the winner of the kindergarten to grade 4 category, and she will, without a doubt, have a proud teacher waiting for her when she goes back to school.

Foster-Cohen said, "One of the good principles of teaching is to have high expectations for your students. Because my experience is that they will work and often exceed those expectations.

"When teaching, I always keep the structure and support of my lesson in mind, but above that, I value student involvement."

Foster-Cohen has been teaching for over 20 years, and over those 20 years she has without a doubt touched many more lives than just Audrey's.

I'd like to congratulate them both for their respective achievements, and I just want to add that this is the type of relationship that we hope all of our students get to have with their teachers. That's certainly the type of teacher all our students deserve.

AGNES MACPHAIL AWARD

Mr. Michael Prue: Each year at this time, I rise right after the Agnes Macphail Award is given out in the former borough of East York to commend wonderful

people who, through their very hard work, make our community so much better.

The Agnes Macphail Award was established 21 years ago in the former borough of East York to honour the birth, on March 24, of the first Canadian woman elected to the House of Commons in Ottawa in 1921, and also the first of two women to be elected to this House in 1943.

This year's winner is Sheila Lacroix. Sheila Lacroix has worked in our community for many, many years. Her formal training and her job is as a librarian, but her true worth to our community is not so much the job that she does during the day, but the job that she does the rest of the time. She is with the Canadian Federation of University Women, and in that role she has helped to hand out scholarships to young women, she has helped the poor through the advocacy of that group, she has helped with political lobbying, and with taking action, including putting up signs during the last provincial election, asking people to ask their politicians what they were doing about poverty. She is also very active in the United Church in Leaside, and in the YWCA women's shelter.

As the award recipient, she received \$2,000, which she donated to a scholarship, in part, and to the YWCA to look after women who are in desperate need of housing.

I thank her very much for her efforts in our community. Congratulations to this year's winner.

PAKISTAN REPUBLIC DAY

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, Pakistan Republic Day is celebrated by more than 300,000 proud Ontarians of Pakistani origin. It commemorates the 74th anniversary of the historic Lahore Resolution adopted on March 23, 1940. The Lahore Resolution formed the basis of the constitution of modern-day Pakistan.

To commemorate the event, a 60-metre monument in the shape of a minaret was built at Iqbal Park, the spot at which the resolution was adopted.

Across Ontario, Canadians of Pakistani origin celebrate Pakistan Republic Day with family and friends, and at community functions.

In Mississauga, the Canada Pakistan Friendship Association brought the community together at the South Common Community Centre in Erin Mills. We were pleased to be joined by Pakistan's consul general, Mr. Mohammad Nafees Zakaria.

1510

Ontarians of Pakistani descent are passionate Canadians whose contribution to commerce, the professions, our communities and our civic and public life enrich our province with the skills, knowledge and passion of a people whose community commitment runs deep.

Pakistan Republic Day celebrations provide an opportunity to celebrate Ontario's diversity and rich heritage in communities all across the province. Our strength lies in our diversity.

Pakistan—Canada zindabad! Shukria.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

Mr. Jim McDonell: The Kemptville and Alfred agricultural colleges have served eastern Ontario with distinction for almost a century and can take much of the credit for the region's success in the agri-food business. Two weeks ago, I was shocked to hear the news that this government was closing the Alfred and Kemptville colleges without any prior public consultation.

The community uproar was immediate and, I believe, caught this government by surprise. Their first strategy was to blame Guelph university, which is trying to deal with the provincial cuts to post-secondary education. No one believed the Premier and the Minister of Colleges and Universities that they were not part of this decision.

Now for some good news: The Alfred college is likely to receive a lifeline from other francophone institutions; however, no effort has been made by this government to save the much larger Kemptville college. In fact, when I contacted St. Lawrence College on Wednesday, they were as shocked as everybody else.

The minister has now asked the two neighbouring colleges to look into saving Kemptville, but this is an empty request without proper time for a response.

So I ask the Premier to immediately place a two-year reprieve on the closure of the Kemptville and Alfred campuses to allow time to investigate and develop a plan for the orderly transfer of assets, programs and students. Do the right thing, Premier: As the Minister of Agriculture, stand up for our youth and the future of agricultural excellence in eastern Ontario. It is time for this government to take some leadership in this area.

EPILEPSY

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I stand in the House today to welcome the epilepsy contingent that was here earlier today and to announce Purple Day.

Cassidy Megan was diagnosed with epilepsy and wanted to raise awareness because she noticed that her classmates didn't know what epilepsy was. Purple Day, named after the internationally recognized colour for epilepsy, lavender, quickly became a global event. Beginning in her home province of Nova Scotia, Megan set aside March 26, 2008, as a day to raise awareness for epilepsy.

Purple Day increases awareness, reduces stigma and empowers individuals living with epilepsy to take action in their communities. Canadians are encouraged to learn more about epilepsy throughout the month of March, culminating with Purple Day on March 26.

There are hundreds of ambassadors in 70 countries worldwide who will be participating in the 2014 Purple Day activities by wearing purple or getting involved in Purple Day awareness or fundraising events.

The Purple Day Act, Bill C-278, was successfully passed through parliamentary readings and received royal assent on June 28 and serves to educate the public and empower the epilepsy community.

March 26 and the pins we are all wearing are meant to help fight the stigma attached to seizure disorders.

EPILEPSY

Mrs. Christine Elliott: Today MPPs are wearing purple ribbons, and some of us are even wearing purple clothing, in honour of Purple Day to promote epilepsy awareness. Purple Day, founded in 2008, is meant to spark discussions about the disorder and to help fight the stigma attached to seizure disorders by educating the public and empowering the epilepsy community.

In my riding of Whitby–Oshawa, we are fortunate to have our local organization, Epilepsy Durham Region, with their amazing CEO, Dianne McKenzie, who offers support and information for people living with epilepsy and their families, caregivers and friends. They run a variety of education and support programs ranging from their Thinking About Epilepsy grade 5 program to providing employment support for people living with epilepsy.

Today, we are lucky to have representatives from Epilepsy Ontario here at Queen's Park to update MPPs on the education, support, research and advocacy work that they do on behalf of those living with epilepsy in Ontario.

Thank you to all of the members who are wearing their purple ribbons in support, and thank you to Epilepsy Ontario and Epilepsy Durham Region for the great work that you do across Ontario to improve the lives of people living with epilepsy.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO BIKE MONTH ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 SUR LE MOIS DE LA BICYCLETTE EN ONTARIO

Mr. Delaney moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 182, An Act to proclaim the month of June as Ontario Bike Month / Projet de loi 182, Loi proclamant le mois de juin Mois de la bicyclette en Ontario.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, this bill proclaims the month of June in each year as Ontario Bike Month.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That is a short statement.

394557 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2014

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill Pr29, An Act to revive 394557 Ontario Limited.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (CLEARING VEHICLES OF SNOW AND ICE), 2014

LOI DE 2014 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (ENLÈVEMENT DE LA NEIGE ET DE LA GLACE DES VÉHICULES)

Mr. Yakabuski moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 183, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit driving a motor vehicle on a highway with a dangerous accumulation of snow or ice / Projet de loi 183, Loi modifiant le Code de la route afin d'interdire la conduite sur une voie publique de véhicules automobiles ayant une accumulation dangereuse de neige ou de glace.

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. John Yakabuski: The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit driving a motor vehicle on a highway if snow or ice has accumulated on the motor vehicle or a vehicle or trailer drawn by the motor vehicle in a manner that would pose a danger to other motor vehicles on the highway.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98, private members' public business on Thursday, March 27, 2014, be limited to consideration of ballot items 82 and 83, and the time allotted to private members' public business be adjusted accordingly; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items number 1 and 4 be waived.

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

Motion agreed to.

1520

PETITIONS

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm going to wait until our page, Nick, comes up and joins me for this one.

I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's Drive Clean Program was implemented only as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and

"Whereas vehicles' emissions have declined so significantly from 1998 to 2013 that they are no longer among the major domestic emitters of smog in Ontario; 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; and

"Whereas the new Drive Clean test no longer assesses tailpipe emissions, but instead scans the on-board diagnostics systems of vehicles, which already perform a series of continuous and periodic emissions checks; and

"Whereas the new Drive Clean test has caused the failure rate to double in less than two months as a result of technical problems with the new emissions testing method; and

"Whereas this new emissions test has caused numerous false 'fails', which have resulted in the overcharging of testing fees for Ontario drivers and car dealerships, thereby causing unwarranted economic hardship and stress;

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

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

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition. I am going to affix my signature and send it down with Nick to the table.

FRENCH-LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Mr. Michael Prue: I have a petition. The same petition was read in yesterday, so I would just like to read the "Be it resolved," because it's a very long petition.

Be it resolved "That the Minister of Education inter-vene to locate an underutilized secondary school building

in the neighbourhood of Riverdale-Danforth, Beaches-East York and Leslieville that may be sold to or shared with both French school boards (public and Catholic) so that each may open their respective French secondary school (grades 7-12) by September 2014 and so that French students no longer must choose between traveling great distances to attend a French secondary school or giving up their French education in favour of a local English school and so that they may have the same benefit as their English counterparts, the right to attend a local secondary school in their neighbourhood."

I'm in agreement. I would affix my signature and send it with page Mustfah.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I move to the next petition, I want to acknowledge the member and thank him for that. You do not have to read an entire petition if it's exceptionally long, to provide time for others, so I appreciate the member for doing so.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will recognize the member from Lanark—Lanark—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Come on—Addington? You're going to make me suffer, aren't you?

Mr. Randy Hillier: No. Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I also want to thank the member from Beaches for making that petition short, as well—our shorter than it could be.

Speaker, I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's signed by over 600 people and it states:

"Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Esbriet for patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), a rare, progressive and fatal disease characterized by scarring of the lungs; and

"Whereas Esbriet, the first and only approved medication in Canada for the treatment of IPF, has been shown to slow disease progression and to decrease the decline in lung function; and

"Whereas the lack of public funding for Esbriet is especially devastating for seniors with IPF who rely exclusively on the provincial drug program for access to medications;

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

"Immediately provide Esbriet as a choice to patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding."

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

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I have a petition signed by the good folks of my riding. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontarians are not legally required to declare their consent on organ/tissue donation; and

“Whereas every Ontarian is issued a health card; and

“Whereas as of November 2013, there are 1,474 Ontarians on the transplant waiting list. Many will die waiting. One donor can save up to eight lives and improve the quality of life for 75 others through the gift of tissue. 95% of Canadians support organ donations. 50% to 60% are willing to donate. In Ontario only 22% have registered consent. Our request is fiscally beneficial as it reduces health care costs, saves lives and improves quality of life;

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

“The Legislative Assembly is asked to initiate law, or reintroduce Bill 58 2012, in which a health card will not be issued to any person of at least 16 years of age or renew a health card of such a person unless the person has completed a declaration, in the required form, that forms part of the card and that specifies whether or not the person consents to having his or her organs or tissue used for transplant purposes after the person’s death.”

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature to it and I will give it to page Samantha.

LYME DISEASE

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

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

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

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

diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

I affix my name in support.

TENANT PROTECTION

Ms. Catherine Fife: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas escalating rental costs are making Ontario less affordable and leaving many tenants financially insecure or falling into poverty;

“Whereas tenants living in residential apartments and condominiums built after 1991 are not protected within the Residential Tenancies Act (RTA) by rent control guidelines, nor are they protected from other arbitrary changes to their rent which currently cannot be appealed to the Landlord and Tenant Board;

“Whereas this has created an unfair two-tier system of tenant protection in Ontario, where some tenants have no protection from large and arbitrary increases;

“Whereas removing these simple exemption loopholes in the RTA law will help protect tenants and help make housing more affordable and secure for thousands of Ontarians;

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

“That the province of Ontario acts to protect all tenants in Ontario and immediately move to ensure that all Ontario tenants living in buildings, mobile home parks and land-lease communities are covered by the rent control guidelines in the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my signature.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I particularly have pleasure in sharing this petition with regard to Esbriet, from the Mildmay area, and it reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Esbriet for patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), a rare, progressive and fatal disease characterized by scarring of the lungs; and

“Whereas Esbriet, the first and only approved medication in Canada for the treatment of IPF, has been shown to slow disease progression and to decrease the decline in lung function; and

“Whereas the lack of public funding for Esbriet is especially devastating for seniors with IPF who rely exclusively on the provincial drug program for access to medications;

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

“Immediately provide Esbriet as a choice to patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding.”

I agree with this petition. I will affix my signature and send it to the desk with Justin.

1530

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

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

“Whereas a motion was introduced at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads ‘that in the opinion of the House, the operation of off-road vehicles on highways under regulation 316/03 be changed to include side-by-side off-road vehicles, four-seat side-by-side vehicles, and two-up vehicles in order for them to be driven on highways under the same conditions as other off-road/all-terrain vehicles’;

“Whereas this motion was passed on November 7, 2013, to amend the Highway Traffic Act 316/03;

“Whereas the economic benefits will have positive impacts on ATV clubs, ATV manufacturers, dealers and rental shops, and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity;

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

“We call on the Ministry of Transportation to implement this regulation immediately.”

I wholeheartedly agree and give it to page Urooj.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Randy Hillier: I’ll make this petition short. I’ll just speak to the resolution of it. It’s to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario regarding Hydro One networks.

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

“That the Premier and the Minister of Energy reduce the waste and duplication in Ontario’s electricity sector and take other necessary steps to lower the cost of electricity so that Ontario’s electricity prices are competitive with other jurisdictions.”

There are over 10,000 people that have signed this petition on my website, and I support it fully.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Esbriet for patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), a rare, progressive and fatal disease characterized by scarring of the lungs; and

“Whereas Esbriet, the first and only approved medication in Canada for the treatment of IPF, has been shown to slow disease progression and to decrease the decline in lung function; and

“Whereas the lack of public funding for Esbriet is especially devastating for seniors with IPF who rely exclusively on the provincial drug program for access to medications;

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

“Immediately provide Esbriet as a choice to patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding.”

I am pleased to affix my name to the petition and will send it to the Clerk through page Urooj.

RENEWABLE FUELS

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the people of Ontario are now paying over a dollar a litre for polluting carbon fuel and they could be paying half that for non-polluting clean fuel, and the province has no contingency in place in case carbon fuel becomes less available or more costly, or if people demand a clean non-carbon contingency fuel to be ready in case gasoline or diesel are found to be causing health or climate problems to Ontarians. Batteries will power some small vehicles, but most normal cars and big trucks and airplanes require GreenNH₃.

“In Ontario some nights there is an excess electric problem which Ontarians pay millions for electricity to be used by others. GreenNH₃ has offered to deal with that problem for free by registered mail, but have not had any reply. That excess electric could be made into GreenNH₃ to power GO trains or GO buses cleanly, but instead you and I pay millions to others to dispose of it. Also GreenNH₃ will create thousands of new high-tech jobs. It could start the next innovation hub as computers did in California. We can get these jobs for free and not pay a million each for them as some do for auto jobs.

“The Insurance Bureau of Canada says \$3 billion will be paid out in claims for 2013 compared to \$1 billion normally because of climate change, and the leaders let on they are for clean alternatives, yet when a resident of Ontario sends numerous registered mail with a proven lower-cost clean technology for five years, they don’t even get a reply?

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

“To formally recognize GreenNH₃ as a fuel and do all things possible as a province legislatively and monetarily to get the GreenNH₃ fuel technology scaled up to a point where it could be commercialized quickly in case carbon fuels become scarce, or out of the viable price of ordinary citizens, or health- or climate-change-related red flags make some Ontarians want to use a clean safe lower-cost non-carbon alternative.”

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M. Michael Prue: I have a petition. Again, I’m only going to read the “Be it resolved” that is in French. It is rather lengthy and it was read in total yesterday by my colleague from Nickel Belt.

«Que le ministre de l’Éducation intervienne pour localiser une école secondaire sous-utilisée du quartier Riverdale-Danforth, Beaches-East York et Leslieville qui pourra être vendue aux deux conseils scolaires

francophones (catholique et public) ou partagée avec ces derniers afin que chacun ouvre leur école secondaire francophone respective (de la 7^e à la 12^e année d'études) en septembre 2014 pour accueillir des élèves francophones qui n'auront plus à choisir entre un déplacement sur une grande distance pour fréquenter une école secondaire francophone et le délaissement à leur éducation en langue française au profit d'une éducation de quartier en langue anglaise, pour jouir du même droit que leurs contreparties de langue anglaise, soit de fréquenter une école secondaire située dans leur quartier. »

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BETTER BUSINESS CLIMATE ACT, 2014

LOI DE 2014 VISANT À INSTAURER UN CLIMAT PLUS PROPICE AUX AFFAIRES

Mr. Hoskins moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 176, An Act to enact the Burden Reduction Reporting Act, 2014 and the Partnerships for Jobs and Growth Act, 2014 / Projet de loi 176, Loi édictant la Loi de 2014 sur l'obligation de faire rapport concernant la réduction des fardeaux administratifs et la Loi de 2014 sur les partenariats pour la création d'emplois et la croissance.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm going to be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member from York Centre.

Mr. Speaker, last week I had the privilege to introduce the Better Business Climate Act. Today I'm pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this proposed legislation that, if passed, would create a better business climate by reducing burdens and driving economic growth by supporting the development of clusters. These two initiatives are a part of our government's economic plan that's focused on sustained job creation and building stronger partnerships right across the economy.

The proposed Better Business Climate Act is key to building on those partnerships, because it's about providing faster, smarter and more streamlined government services to businesses, and it's about reducing the burden of regulatory and administrative activities to save our businesses time and make running a business in Ontario easier. Of course, we need to take a balanced approach to preserving the regulations needed to protect the health and safety of our people, while shedding those that impose unnecessary burdens for businesses.

I want to be perfectly clear on this point: The focus is on examining and improving how the government works and interacts with stakeholders and provides services, not

on reducing or arbitrarily removing necessary regulatory requirements or regulations.

For example, as part of the Fewer Burdens, Greater Growth report released in January, WSIB has reduced the length of the no-lost-time injury claim form by 60% and now allows these claims to be made online or over the phone. It may seem like a simple measure, but these types of measures save significant time, which translates, of course, into money for our businesses across the province.

Administrative process changes like these can save Ontario businesses literally millions of dollars while still protecting the public interest.

Mr. Speaker, these burdens, whether they're time or money or resources, are a burden to business, and they negatively impact our productivity, our innovation and economic growth. We're committed to reducing unnecessary burdens on an ongoing basis by making Ontario one of the few places in the world that measures and indeed reports on the time and financial savings to businesses. As part of this initiative, every single ministry will have to identify and target regulatory burdens to reduce each and every year.

Mr. Speaker, this will ensure that we're taking a modern, sophisticated and multi-ministerial approach, so that all of government is working together to streamline and reduce the time and money that businesses spend, so they can focus on growing and competing in our global economy. Not only does that help our business, but it also makes Ontario a much more attractive place to invest.

1540

We're pleased to be recognized as a Canadian leader in the reduction of unnecessary regulatory requirements by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. When we announced our intent to introduce this proposed legislation, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business applauded the changes. They said that Ontario will be joining the "best in class in regulatory reform."

Our proposed legislation on burden reduction also has strong support from stakeholders including the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Toronto Financial Services Alliance and the Toronto Region Board of Trade.

Since 2008, our Open for Business initiative to modernize government has eliminated some 80,000 burdens already, which represents 17% of all regulatory requirements. We're making further improvements that will save our businesses \$100 million over the next three years. We believe this is a realistic target that will help businesses across the province as they spend less time filling out paperwork, searching for information, hiring consultants and awaiting government approvals.

You may ask, "How do we know that our \$100-million target for businesses is achievable?" We know because we started in 2013 to attribute dollar and time costs to our work on burden reduction projects and assessing the savings in time and money that would accrue to businesses as a result of our burden reductions.

We know the world of business is changing constantly, and government needs to keep pace with this change by continually making its processes faster, smarter and easier for businesses and stakeholders. This is why this proposed legislation, quite frankly, is so important. By committing government to annual reporting, this legislation will, if passed, ensure that this and future governments will stay focused on burden reduction and modernizing processes.

British Columbia and Saskatchewan have both passed similar pieces of legislation in recent years. By enshrining annual reporting on burden reduction in legislation, Ontario will not only catch up to other leading jurisdictions on this issue, but we will become a global leader.

Mr. Speaker, there's a second component to the proposed Better Business Climate Act. To build stronger partnerships between government and business, our government is committed to supporting the growth of strong regional economic clusters. Now, a cluster is a specific geographic concentration of businesses both large and small, along with the institutions and the people that support them: our colleges and universities, our not-for-profits, local governments and labour. Clusters exist right across the province, from the mining and forestry clusters in northern Ontario to the obvious financial services cluster here in Toronto to the high-tech clusters in Ottawa, Toronto, and Kitchener-Waterloo. In fact, our high-tech cluster here in the province is the second-largest high-tech sector in all of North America, just after California.

We know the importance of clusters to building our economy. We know that governments cannot single-handedly create them. What we can do, however, is help to catalyze and grow them. Cluster development plans are designed to act as this catalyst. They will help to facilitate stronger cluster planning and collaboration with business, industry and partner ministries to raise the province's capacity for innovation and economic prosperity. Through the planning process, Ontario will facilitate new partnerships by working with industry leaders to identify key policies that will support a long-term vision and plan for cluster growth.

The Better Business Climate Act will, if passed, bring this cluster model to regions right across the province and across, as I mentioned, a large variety of sectors. This legislation would provide our government with a new tool to build partnerships with business and industry, colleges and universities, not-for-profits, labour and all levels of government. It will help to identify and build up emerging clusters and to strengthen existing ones.

Now, building strategic cluster plans will include outlining clear, established goals and coordinating actions to support the development of a specific cluster. Mandatory reviews of the plans would be required every five years to evaluate progress and ensure that these plans align with changing industry and emerging economic trends.

So, whether it's reducing burdens to help improve our business climate and save businesses time and money, or

if it's strengthening our regional economic clusters across the province, our government's economic plan will continue to get results and will continue to create jobs for today and jobs for tomorrow, because we know that a strong economy is not only possible when we invest in our greatest strengths—our people—but, as we are seeing today, investing in our partnerships.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I want to pick up where Minister Hoskins left off about partnerships, and how the Better Business Climate Act will, if passed, enhance partnerships between our government and Ontario business.

Ontario has made great strides in adapting to the recent changes in the global economic system. Our plan is focused on sustained job creation and building stronger partnerships across the economy. The proposed legislation complements the government's actions to strengthen the economy and increase Ontario's overall competitiveness, including:

- investing \$35 billion in infrastructure;
- introducing Ontario's Going Global trade strategy;
- announcing the \$295-million youth jobs strategy;
- reducing the marginal effective tax rate on new business investment in Ontario by half since 2009; and
- ensuring that Ontarians have the skills and education they need to succeed in a globalized market.

We have done well in steering Ontario through some challenging times, and we plan to continue with our successes.

Many economic experts say that Ontario can become an even more prosperous and competitive jurisdiction in the 21st century by leveraging government-business partnerships to help strengthen industry clusters. In markets worldwide, cluster development has accelerated economic development by creating supportive environments for business, academia and innovation.

Industry plays a key role in regional economic development. They can help support the creation of sustainable, well-paid jobs, stimulate innovation, attract investment, strengthen linkages between research institutions and firms, and anchor a talented workforce.

Mr. Speaker, that's one half of the equation of the proposed Better Business Climate Act. The other is burden reduction. I want to emphasize that Ontario's new approach to burden reduction was not developed in isolation. It has emerged from speaking to business groups and stakeholders for several years.

In 2008, the government created Ontario Open for Business, a cross-government initiative to create faster and smarter government-to-business services. Through this initiative, we removed over 80,000 unnecessary regulatory burdens.

Ontario's regulatory policy includes a range of tools and processes to make sure, when new regulations are needed to protect Ontarians' health and safety or our environment, that they are effective, transparent and evidence-based.

The new tools, policies and processes of the Open for Business initiative are changing the regulatory landscape across our government, helping to ensure ministries continue to work creatively and transparently to reduce unnecessary burden and to find ways to make business-to-government interactions as seamless and cost-effective as possible.

I am proud of the work that we are doing in collaboration with business leaders and other stakeholders to help position Ontario as a global leader in reducing barriers to business, and proud of the great strides we have made in developing clusters in important sectors like financial services, and information and communications technologies.

The Better Business Climate Act, if passed, will help us build better partnerships between our government and business, and a better quality of life for all Ontarians.

1550

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to stand and address what we've just heard, because I have a problem with one comment that was shared: that right here, right now, Ontario is an attractive place to invest. That's not what we're hearing on this side of the House.

I'm telling you: As we face the export of our youth and the export of our businesses to the United States, we have to take a look at ourselves and really understand what's causing our young people, our corporations and our businesses to consider moving out of this area. The fact of the matter is that we need a climate that is encouraging investment and confidence in Ontario.

The fact is that the underlying problem that is seen in Ontario is the cost of electricity. I have corporations in my riding that have been there for over 100 years, and because of the mismanagement of the energy file, they're facing really difficult times. Other folks—I can start rhyming them off. Champion Motor Graders was bought out by Volvo in Goderich; they relocated to Pennsylvania. E.D. Smith, out of Seaforth, relocated to the States as well. And the list goes on and on.

As I said, the underlying issue in all of this is that we have a province that is burdened with regulations that are handcuffing small business and causing them to experience a total of \$11 billion—research is showing that regulatory burden in Ontario is costing our businesses \$11 billion, and then you add the cost of electricity on top of that.

When I was in Windsor a couple of weeks ago, I learned that convenience stores were experiencing hydro bills which were steeper than their rent. We have to address this in a more serious context.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: As always, it's an honour to stand in this House. Today, I respond to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment and his introduction of the Better Business Climate Act.

Something that could create a better business climate is actually following through, or lessening the uncertainty coming from northern Ontario: the not-so-better business climate coming from cancelling the ONTC, if you're a company in northern Ontario, and all of a sudden it's announced that your freight line might not be there anymore.

Something that could create a better business climate in Ontario: Instead of announcing for years what you're going to do and about how the Ring of Fire is going to be the economic engine of the province, maybe it would be good to take steps so that we could actually approach the Ring of Fire, and so that we could consult with the First Nations. Instead of talking about it for years, holding press conferences where the refinery is going to be, before you've ever even started to consult the First Nations—that is not creating a good business climate in Ontario.

This is a good thing to talk about, a good bill to talk about. Hopefully we can get some good things out of it, but let's take a look at the big picture. The other members talked about hydro prices. Talk about a way to create a better business climate: to create hydro costs that are so high that you've got businesses like Xstrata in Timmins leaving the province. One of the most environmentally friendly smelters in North America closes and is torn down because they can't afford our hydro prices.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: That ore is still being smelted in another province. It's much more environmentally unfriendly, yet it moved because of our not-better business climate.

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

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to begin by actually refuting the arguments that were put forward by the member from—Huron—Bruce?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): No, Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: No, Huron—Bruce and Timiskaming—Cochrane. Thank you.

I have here a statistic that says that Toronto ranks number 3 in North America and 11th globally in competitiveness ratings for global financial centres. So we are competitive, and it's no accident that we are competitive. We are competitive because of a series of initiatives that have been taken over the last 10 years by this government. This Better Business Climate Act is just the latest in a series of initiatives that this government has introduced, whether it's competitive tax rates, whether it's a regulation that says that for every new regulation that's added, you have to remove two. These are all little things this government has been doing for a long time to cut red tape.

I remember in the Mike Harris years, when governments could still blatantly advertise, there was this big hoarding all the time where you could see this detective-like guy saying, "I'm going to cut red tape," but no red tape was cut. Along comes the Liberal government, and

we really began to cut red tape. This Better Business Climate Act—

Interjection.

Ms. Dipika Damerla: I know that the member from Renfrew-Nipissing remembers those ads. I know that he remembers them. They were all over the GTA. I don't know if they were up in Pembroke.

But my point is that this is a very good act. What it's going to do is save businesses and stakeholders over \$100 million by 2016-17. Think about that: \$100 million. That's a lot of money we can use and put to good use to ensure that those in need—

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, it's wonderful listening to the noble intentions of the minister, and I have to pat him on the back for the noble intentions. I will maybe start off by showing the minister an Ontario Provincial Offences pocket edition handbook, if the minister hasn't seen this yet. This book is 3,600 pages in length. The interesting thing about this book, about regulations—

Interjection: What pocket does it fit in?

Mr. Randy Hillier: The Liberals do have deep pockets after they have taken everybody else's money, but I don't think it would even fit in that.

In 2003, this book was less than 2,000 pages in length; it's now over 3,500 pages in length. Each one of those new pages is full of new regulations—new regulations. I would say this to the minister: If, indeed, he is well intended about this bill, where you first have to go is defining what a regulation is, because even in this House we don't have a definition of what a regulation or a regulatory step is. In order to be able to cut something, you have to first be able to measure and quantify what it is, and you guys haven't done that yet. There is no definition of a regulatory step.

I think that's really where you have to go at this. Until you do that, we can hear all this nonsense, as the previous member said, about you cutting regulations, but you haven't. The book gets bigger and bigger and we all need to have bigger and deeper pockets, just so that you guys can get your hands in there and buy a few more gas plants where we don't need them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment has two minutes.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of my colleagues for their comments and insights. I'd encourage the last speaker to bring that book across and explain to me precisely which regulations he would want to cut from that book.

I want to conclude by going back to what I said when I introduced the Better Business Climate Act. This proposed legislation is all about partnerships. It's about how we can work together with business and, frankly, many other partners to continue to grow the economy. It is an economy that is growing, despite what the PC Party has said.

We have added 440,000 net new full-time jobs since the bottom of the recession. Despite what they'd like to claim about the investment climate in this province, the fact is that we are and remain the number one destination for foreign direct investment in all of North America.

We believe in our partnership with business, and we'll continue to work with them to grow the economy, create more jobs and strengthen our business climate. Our government's economic plan to create jobs and grow the economy is focused precisely on our greatest strengths: our people and our strategic partnerships.

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The Better Business Climate Act, if passed, will help to provide faster, smarter and certainly more streamlined government services to our businesses. It will, if passed, help us find that balance, something that perhaps the PC Party doesn't fully understand, because they want to cut regulations by one third. But we need to keep that balance between regulations that are essential to protect health, safety and the environment and those that are unnecessary burdens for businesses. That's precisely where we, as a government, are landing.

This legislation will, if passed, hold this and all future governments accountable for ensuring that we improve Ontario's business climate and that reducing unnecessary burden remains a government priority.

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

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you so much. I'm still thinking about this pocketbook and whose pocket it could actually fit in.

Thank you to those members who have taken part in debate on this legislation this afternoon. As the economic development, trade and employment critic for Her Majesty's loyal opposition, I am pleased to rise today to offer yet another response to the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. It is a special occasion. I say that not because this will be my first leadoff as a critic; I say that because it is rare that we in this House are offered the chance to debate legislation brought forward by this ministry.

By my count, this is only the third piece of legislation brought forward by a Minister of Economic Development since the ministry was created in 1990. It is technically the first piece of legislation introduced by a Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, because the full "Trade and Employment" title is new. I believe that it is also the first formal piece of legislation introduced by the member for St. Paul's since he took office four and a half years ago. So, through no fault of his own, Bill 176 arrives with a sense of historic occasion.

I have had the great good fortune of serving as critic opposite the minister twice now, first as critic for children and youth, a role I dearly loved, and now with my current portfolio. The Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment is, in some ways, a critic's nightmare. He cuts a dashing and sympathetic figure. He is, of course, a bright, Oxford-educated Rhodes Scholar,

a caring humanitarian who headed up War Child Canada alongside his beautiful and talented wife; a doctor decorated with honours and accolades, from the Order of Canada to the United Nations Lester B. Pearson Peace Medal to the Governor General's Meritorious Service Cross, and on and on.

But we must acknowledge that there have been some disappointments too. This is, I regret to say, the same member who, with a straight face, rationalized the former Premier's disgraceful prorogation by comparing the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate to a war zone. In one throwaway phrase, he managed to cheapen the suffering of families in legitimate war zones and put a cynical, partisan spin on the opposition's push for accountability. This place is not a war zone; it is closer to Twilight Zone.

I would remind all those listening at home that then, as now, we seek answers on behalf of the people of Ontario, whose interests we were elected to serve. If the debate in this Legislature becomes heated, it glows with the understandable outrage of our constituents. Our party's campaign for answers on scandals such as Ornge and the power plant cancellations has led to not one, but two OPP investigations of this government, and the ongoing quest for answers from this cabinet has made some of the members opposite extremely uncomfortable. It has resulted in legislation like Bill 176, which is disappointing and perhaps a little ironic.

During his party's leadership campaign, the member for St. Paul's described himself as "untethered from the machinery of politics," which I suppose we all were at that point, since the Legislature was closed. Win or lose, he expressed optimism that Ontario Liberals would fundamentally change their stripes. He said: "If it's" business "as usual, we will not succeed. We can't just rearrange the storefront." And yet here we are with Bill 176—same old storefront, same generic brand in the window.

In response to the minister's statement on the introduction of this bill last week, I remarked that this bill was "little more than window dressing." I regret that, in the minute and a half that I had at the time, I was unable to address this proposed legislation with the depth and detail that it deserves. I am grateful for the opportunity to rise again today to enrich the debate around this legislation and the economic issues that it claims to engage.

It's important that all members of this House and all Ontarians understand the context of this legislation, why we are debating it here today, why I have described it in unflattering terms and why I will not be supporting this proposed legislation. In keeping with its limited but inflatable language, Bill 176 is the world's littlest omnibus—containing the smallest number of schedules you can have and still claim to be an omnibus bill—that proposes two entirely separate acts. It is also a piece of legislation that I will, quite frankly, be challenged to discuss as anything but an insult to the working people of Ontario. We have seen no shortage of so-called window dressing legislation from this government, bills that pro-

pose to take strong action, for example, only to take the easy way out.

The tired responses of the party opposite are not a solution. They are part of the problem. They are part of the problem, and Bill 176 is more of the same. It is all talk, and not much of that. It is merely empty legislation that announces an intention but does nothing. It has been crafted to serve as a proof point for future debate, designed to insulate the government on matters where it is most vulnerable, such as economic mismanagement and a dismal track record on accountability, while constructing a façade of good government. It is all as thin and insubstantial as a wafer.

Some would argue that this is just one of many like it, a component of a larger system of empty, ineffective or deceptive bills that are as thin as veneer and which some would say are not even really meant to pass into law. They are most valuable as bumper stickers, catchphrases that can be invoked as proof points during fundraising campaigns and election debates.

Bill 176 is the government striking an action pose. The so-called Better Business Climate Act amounts to a pile of words delivered without purpose, conviction or urgency. Coming from a minister whose scholarly background is a huge part of his personal brand and arriving in the midst of the world's worst economic challenges and social disruptions in generations, I find it impossible not to be deeply disappointed and frankly even saddened by this legislation before us today.

This legislation is entirely symbolic, without substance, and has no reason to exist other than as a platform of Liberal messaging. I have the greatest respect for the minister, and I know that he is capable of more than this. In his heart, I believe he also knows this to be true. There is no question that the people of Ontario deserve better than this from a government bill. They deserve creativity, courage and leadership from those entrusted with the reins of our economy. I believe that he knows this to be true as well.

Speaker, with your indulgence, I would like to describe the economic context in which Bill 176 is received and the challenges against which its recommended tools must ultimately be judged. Since the minister took up this portfolio 13 months ago, dozens of companies have closed or announced plans to move jobs out of Ontario. While we often hear speakers from the party opposite assert that the province's economy has recovered all of those jobs lost since before the recession, the government members are silent on the finer points. The numbers that the government waves around do not take into account their relative value, because Ontario's working-age population has grown over the last several years. We are still playing catch-up in terms of proportional employment.

As well, the economy has undergone a sea change under the government. High-paying, long-term, permanent positions are being replaced with lower-paying, less secure jobs. Terms like "part-time," "contract," "seasonal" or "temporary" are far more common than they once were. Pretending the two categories are somehow equal

is convenient spin, not a realistic appraisal of the state of the economy or the challenges ahead. Throwing around millions in corporate welfare might be—a media cycle. But it cannot undo the failed policies and economic mismanagement that have hobbled this province as an economic engine.

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Wrong-headed, ineffective policies aren't helping to foster new growth either. A recent survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that only one in six Ontario businesses said that they thought the provincial government has a vision that supports small business. Just three in 100 said that Premier Wynne understands the reality of running a small business.

The good news: Ontario business leaders are passionate and they're driven. They know their market and they believe in their product. Our entrepreneurs—there's still opportunity everywhere. Our workers are skilled, creative and hard-working, and these strengths are enormous advantages.

But business cannot realize its full potential until the government does its part. The provincial government has been slow to wake up to this fact, as Bill 176 proves. Policy after policy has been rolled out without giving thought to the impact on business. We've seen a decade of hesitation, mismanagement and inaction from the Ontario Liberal government when it comes to jobs, the economy and reining in the government's spending. This government has stayed in its bubble, kept its head in the sand, and failed to tap into the expertise of the private sector. It has lost track of the priorities of Ontarians about what businesses want and what they need.

Ontario's businesses live in the real world. They know that capital is mobile and that investors can go where they feel they stand the greatest odds of being successful. It's clear that this provincial government is not listening carefully to the needs of businesses, particularly small businesses, the seeds of future prosperity.

The Liberal government doesn't even look after its own business very well. They have no plan to balance the budget, no plan to reduce taxes on small businesses or address the burden of red tape. No plan to create jobs, Speaker. Kick-starting economic growth and ending Ontario's debt crisis are interdependent. By the same token, one might argue that the opposite is also true. Runaway debt and uncontrollable spending hamstring the government's ability to maintain the status quo, let alone adapt to unforeseen events.

Since 2003, the Liberals have doubled the provincial debt and run up a deficit bigger than all other provinces combined. Government spending in Ontario is \$22 billion higher than it was five budgets ago, an increase of 20% during an era of non-growth. The stimulus funding that the Liberal government told us was temporary has now become permanent. The blue-sky spending has severely limited our ability to maintain the quality of life the people of this province expect and demand.

Ontario's unemployment rate has been above the national average for almost seven straight years. Over half a

million of our neighbours here in Ontario are out of work. Yet the government still won't produce a credible jobs plan. Over the last decade, Ontario has seen over 330,000 manufacturing jobs vanish. That's the equivalent of a city the size of London, Ontario, waking up to a bleak, cold landscape and a long wait until sunrise. Since the recession, Ontario has had the highest long-term unemployment rate in the country, and the average length of unemployment for jobless in this province is 22 weeks. It has been that way for the last four years.

When it comes to our hope for the future, our children's prospects are darkest. Their unemployment rate is more than 16%, nearly three times the national average. Like it or not, that sends a clear message. This government's policies are just killing manufacturing jobs. They're driving talented young people away, and Bill 176 offers them little reason to look back.

Nearly a third of Ontario's part-time workers want full-time work but can't find it. That figure is 5% higher than when the party opposite formed government. Again, as with general unemployment rates, Ontario's rates of involuntary part-time work is also higher than the national average.

We've seen this government's ideology on power, an ill-conceived green energy plan that killed four jobs in the broader economy for each one it created in markets like wind and solar. Alongside that, homeowners and businesses have watched with horror as hydro rates have tripled in the past decade and continue to skyrocket. Not long ago, the energy minister revealed that rates would undergo a hefty increase over the next five years.

This government's lax business fundamentals represent a barrier to economic growth in Ontario, but Bill 176 pretends that the gorilla is not in the room.

Ontario's trade deficit has been called the single largest drag on our province's economic growth, and it shows no sign of going anywhere under this government. According to the Liberals' own trade fact sheet, Ontario exports from 2012 were substantially below where they stood in 2003. Import levels have increased by 15% in that time. The result is that Ontario's annual trade deficit has more than doubled since the Liberals came into office. The picture only worsens once you take inflation into account, and it has been estimated that only 6% of Ontario small businesses export at all.

We're not punching above our weight, but Bill 176 is silent on that point. Ontario is an export economy, and this government appears to be more interested in exotic junkets than the mundane work of lowering trade barriers.

The Ontario Progressive Conservative Party has urged this government on numerous occasions to pursue trade relations with other provinces that will reduce or remove artificial barriers to growth, yet Ontario has arrived at one interprovincial trade deal, six years ago, with Quebec. Our province's outsized reliance on exports to the United States, where more than three quarters of our exports wind up, has lulled us into a false sense of security.

There is a cautionary tale about eggs and baskets that would apply here.

During boom times, Ontario simply had to keep up with orders, but when the States are hit with a bear market or are enduring a period of economic stagnation, things become vastly more problematic. It is important for our government to constantly be initiating, pursuing and finalizing free trade agreements with other jurisdictions at home as well as abroad. It is important to remember in everything we do that Ontario is competing in a global market, but Bill 176 struggles to tie its shoelaces.

Ontario businesses are about to experience unprecedented opportunity overseas as free trade agreements with the EU and South Korea come on stream, yet apparently we don't even bother to undertake any committed activity that would boost Ontario's exports within Canada or lead to income substitution. Again, Bill 176 neglects to engage this key economic issue.

Next year will mark the 20th anniversary of the Agreement on Internal Trade. In December 2013, the Committee on Internal Trade, of which the minister is a member, met to discuss ways to reduce interior barriers to trade—a teleconference call. Ontario is literally phoning it in when it comes to the matter of interprovincial trade, but we're flying halfway around the world for a photo op in a Dubai Tim Hortons.

And Saskatchewan is still deciding what to do with a legal opinion indicating that Ontario's local knowledge requirement may be in violation of the Agreement on Internal Trade, something we have seen again with regard to the College of Trades: red tape forcing Red Seal trades from other provinces to recertify in order to work in Ontario. Interprovincial trade barriers shaved billions off our productivity and hurt Ontario business's ability to compete at home and abroad. But again, Bill 176 is mute.

The urgency of overcoming interprovincial trade barriers was squarely tackled by Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, at the beginning of this year. In a commentary in the *Globe and Mail*, he wrote, "Canada just concluded the most comprehensive trade agreement in our history. It's ironic that the provinces were able to find common ground with our agreement with Europe and yet they have a difficult time sitting in the same room to discuss trade amongst themselves. At the same time that we're undertaking the most ambitious international trade agenda in Canadian history, we remain divided internally. It's sobering to think of a future where it's easier for Ontario to trade with Europe or India than for Alberta to trade with Quebec."

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Mr. Beatty was echoed by an editorial in yesterday's *Windsor Star* that remarked:

"[I]f Hoskins is really concerned about cutting unnecessary costs and time of businesses, he might also want to start championing the benefits of breaking down the barriers that prevent the free trade of goods and services across provincial borders.

"For example, it's estimated interprovincial trade is worth about \$300 billion a year, yet a series of internal trade barriers amount to a 7% tax—about \$20 billion. Businesses could better use that money to take advantage of new marketing opportunities and cut costs.

"In fact, a group of seven business groups—including the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, and Council of Chief Executives—has said the problem is so serious that the recently negotiated EU trade deal will provide better access to European countries into the Canadian market than the provinces are willing to give each other."

This is no digression. This is the lens through which we must evaluate the promise and reality of Bill 176. In light of the diversity and severity of issues impacting Ontario's economy today, and in the context of the Premier's talk of an aspirational budget, it is not hard to imagine that this bill is much of anything at all.

Ontario faces serious problems. When will this government take the economy seriously enough to unveil a real jobs plan? Bill 176 is not animated by a grand idea of the province, and it suggests no sweeping visions for how to proceed—no connection to reality.

The components of the bill, the two acts, sit awkwardly beside each other. Despite the fact that this bill is apparently supposed to take the torch from 2010's bill, Bill 68—what the government refers to as the Open for Business Act—it could hardly be less like that bill.

Incidentally, Bill 68 arrived in May 2010. That followed extended efforts by the Ontario Progressive Conservative caucus to get the Liberal government to take real steps to reduce red tape in order to help create jobs and unlock economic growth.

In October 2009 we released a small business jobs plan which called on then-Premier McGuinty to resurrect the Red Tape Commission, which he dismantled after forming government in 2003. In March 2010, we unveiled a 10 for 2010 plan, which, again, called on the government to resurrect the Red Tape Commission.

Although our party's dedicated efforts have produced some progress on regulatory reform, the Liberal government remains unwilling to take decisive action on this important issue. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, on the other hand, announced the creation of a Red Tape Reduction Commission in January 2013. The CFIB was, as you might expect, enthusiastically supportive, describing it as "music to the ears of any Canadian that has ever dealt with excessive and often senseless government rules, regulations and paperwork."

Unfortunately, since that time, the Ontario government's most visible reduction in useless paperwork can be found in legislation such as this. Bill 68 is 166 pages long. Bill 176 is just eight pages long, and really only six of those contain the meat of the proposed legislation. That's longer than the last piece of legislation to come from the ministry: 2012's Bill 11, at six pages. But where both Bill 68 and Bill 11 attempted to do something, the language in Bill 176 is so painstakingly vague that it comes across as more of a teaser than a long-awaited

sequel. If passed, Bill 176 would enact the Burden Reduction Reporting Act, 2014 and the Partnership for Jobs and Growth Act, 2014.

So let's look under the hood here. The explanatory note tells us that "Schedule 1 enacts the Burden Reduction Reporting Act, 2014, which requires the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment to publish an annual report with respect to actions taken by the government of Ontario to reduce burdens." These briefs are typically more abstract than the legislation itself, so let's look at schedule 1.

I doubt that anyone would take exception to the preamble of the Burden Reductions Reporting Act. It reads:

"Ontario recognizes that the ongoing maintenance of a modern, efficient, accountable and transparent regulatory and administrative environment is necessary to foster economic growth, prosperity and a competitive business climate.

"Statutory, regulatory, procedural, administrative and other requirements are necessary to protect the public interest, including health, safety and the environment. However, some requirements may also create burdens, such as burdens inadvertently created over time, that unnecessarily inhibit productivity, job creation and innovation."

Not all regulation is created equal, in other words. No argument here—red tape is relative. Some regulations are in place for very good reasons, and should remain so. We often debate these very matters here in this House, which is as it should be in a healthy democracy.

Schedule 1 of Bill 176 is designed to create the appearance that the Liberal government is taking action to reduce the regulatory burden for businesses in Ontario. It is important to emphasize, however, that it does not take any concrete steps toward that goal. All the legislation actually does is require the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment to release a report about what the government is doing to reduce the regulatory burden. It doesn't set out any specific targets or metrics for measuring progress, or even suggest that objective evidence should be driving these evaluations.

The Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, on the other hand, has a red tape reduction plan that has clear goals, one that we have talked about repeatedly, both inside and outside of this House. We would reduce regulation by one third over the course of three years. We also have clearly defined implementation structures: The Deputy Premier would be responsible for regulation reduction, with the pay of cabinet ministers tied to performance on this count.

The Liberals, meanwhile, are content to settle for another annual report on a highly stage-managed public relations opportunity. This is an empty legislative initiative that actually empowers the minister to create more regulations in a bill to reduce the regulatory burden for businesses. This regulatory power even allows the minister to regulate himself or herself out of a publication deadline. Subsection 2(2)(b) tells us that this annual report would be made available on or before June 30,

unless the minister chooses another date and sets it via regulations.

This regulatory clause is notable, not just because of the irony that it is actively creating red tape even as the schedule allegedly seeks to cut red tape; it is also notable because the habit of leaving all the heavy lifting to regulations is an anti-democratic reflex that is at odds with the government's frequent talk of transparency and accountability. We have seen this time and time again from this government's bills, where all of the really crucial details are postponed for a later date in a space free from public scrutiny or debate. Or you might be more comfortable with the possibility that government legislators simply got tired, stopped caring and ran out of ideas. In any event, the upshot is the same: The details will be sorted out in cabinet and we'll learn about it in the back pages of the Ontario Gazette.

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In last week's opening statement related to Bill 176, the minister remarked, "Since 2008, our Open for Business initiative to modernize government has eliminated 80,000 burdens, which represent 17% of all regulatory requirements..." This was a claim that I red-flagged in my response, and I think that the point I made last week is worth repeating here again today, Speaker. I observed that the very same claim about red tape reduction had been made by the previous Minister of Economic Development in January 2012, although he was more exact, calling it a 17.2% reduction.

The fact remains, however, that these essentially identical claims, delivered two years apart, illustrate the need for decisive action and the perils of government complacency. What we are seeing is a two-year period in which there has been little to no progress on red tape, an issue that the business community regularly tells us is a high priority and which is apparently urgent enough that it has led to the creation of schedule 1 of Bill 176, but, aside from that, not urgent enough to do much about.

Again, in January 2012, the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Innovation trumpeted the fact that the government has eliminated 80,000 pieces of regulation since 2008. This very claim was repeated by the sitting Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment. In 2011, the minister before that, who was recently appointed chair of Hydro One, boasted that the government had wiped out 70,000 pieces of regulation since 2008. These are all perfectly round numbers, which is how you know that they're not being made up on the fly, but assuming that these are legitimate accomplishments, what do these numbers tell us?

First, something that will be perfectly obvious to all of us: that the government's ambitions essentially left the building around the 2011 election. Approximately 88% of the progress the government claims to have made on regulatory burden reduction took place between 2008 and 2011. The remainder took place in the following six months. How do we explain that unusual three-year burst of activity followed by basically nothing? Why did the momentum just die out like that? First, remember that

most of the regulatory burden reduction appears to be linked to the onset of taxation reform, specifically the harmonized sales tax. As of Canada Day 2010, two tax structures became one. Given the depth and complexity of the tax code, it seems reasonable to assume that most of the 80,000 regulations eliminated since 2008 took place before July 1, 2010. The remainder took place in the 18 months that followed.

Since January 2012, there seems to have been little to no headway to speak of. I have to ask: Why on earth is legislation required here? Does the government not track its investments of time and energy now? Does it not evaluate performance? Does it not benchmark its achievements for its own good, if not for the people of Ontario? Does it not already learn from those evaluations and adjust its policy accordingly? As far as the matter of submitting an annual report, the members of this Legislature should be familiar with the government's results-based planning book and fiscal year financials. Should we be encouraged that it takes legislation to compel the minister to do his or her job? Does this legislation create any formal inspiration for the minister to do anything more than he or she should be doing, or is this just one more way of branding the government?

Obviously, this is a government that has not been especially committed to reducing the administrative burden of red tape on business. That burden, as the Canadian Federation of Independent Business reminds us, saps billions from our businesses and households every single year. It compromises productivity. It compounds stress and worry, and it adds needless expense, sucking money out of the broader economy.

Another organization that has sounded off on the high cost of red tape is the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, RCCAO. They issued their wake-up call in an independent study in 2010 that was followed up again just recently. It's called *Are Ontario's Municipal Class Environmental Assessments Worth the Added Time and Cost?* The RCCAO found that in the past four years the average completion time for a municipal class environmental assessment has grown by well over a third, thanks to the overregulation, increasing from 19 months to 26 months. The added cost to infrastructure projects is estimated to be an additional 10% on construction costs due to associated delays.

All of us are aware of the ways in which the infrastructure deficit negatively impacts quality of life in our ridings and neighbourhoods. This is no small concern. Given the scale of money invested in infrastructure annually, the money potentially being wasted as a result of government inaction is truly staggering.

As I noted earlier, the public remarks of the last three Ministers of Economic Development captured the progress of red tape reduction. You can see this reflected in the annual red tape report cards tallied up by the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Ontario's ranking has been essentially flat for the last three years. Conveniently lost in all of this is the fact that the

former Premier had promised a 25% reduction in red tape by 2011. Three years later, we're still at 17%.

Interjection: Get out of here.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: I can't believe it.

Admittedly, the former Premier promised a lot of things that never came to pass.

Ontario's economy is facing serious challenges. Ontario's people deserve a government that is serious about this economy.

In his opening comment the minister remarked that, "Under the improved strategy, we will not only continue to identify unnecessary burdens, but we'll reduce and eliminate them, saving businesses even more time and money." This is a particularly instructive statement. The minister promises that he will not only identify needless regulations but he is prepared to reduce or, if push comes to shove, eliminate them. Ontario businesses owners will undoubtedly sleep easier.

One might reasonably ask: If the government is aware that a regulation is unnecessary, if they have evaluated it and found it to be redundant, outdated or otherwise useless, why would they not eliminate it as a matter of standard procedure? Do you not question yourself of that? Why, by the same token, would you seek to merely reduce a regulatory burden that you have explicitly identified as unnecessary? It is a very strange thing to expect to be congratulated on, or to hold up as an aspirational goal. If you believe that a piece of regulation has no productive value other than to fatten the bureaucracy, why not just get rid of it altogether?

Schedule 2 of Bill 176, the so-called Partnership for Jobs and Growth Act, 2014, begins with another vanilla-flavoured preamble:

"Ontario is committed to maintaining its competitive edge in the increasingly competitive global economy.

"Clusters, which are geographically concentrated groups of interconnected businesses and related entities, can perform an important function in regional economic development by increasing productivity, innovation and competitiveness.

"Ontario can act as a catalyst to spur the development of clusters. By working with businesses and other entities to develop plans with respect to the development of clusters, Ontario can promote the growth of jobs and the economy."

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What exactly does schedule 2 go on to do? It empowers the minister to consult, create a plan, review the plan every five years, produce a report and make regulations. But how does this create jobs or stimulate economic growth? The short answer is that it doesn't. This is about creating more panels, more reports and more work for bureaucrats. It's not about private sector jobs at all.

Economic clusters are organic by nature. They can't be created by government from the top down. This is especially true of high-tech sectors such as information and communications technology, or ICT. That sector is highly prized by governments the world over because it tends to be a job creation dynamo. Some studies suggest

that start-up businesses in the ICT sector are responsible for new jobs and new businesses—almost 50% more likely to grow than the private sector as a whole.

The trouble with trying to bottle this sector's lightning is telegraphed in its name: information and communications technology. Although they tend to locate in the same markets, these companies may not be very tight on the map. In fact, those firms don't have to be located anywhere in particular. The technology they create is part of the reason they can be so widespread. By some estimates, almost two thirds of the workforce of Silicon Valley firms are located outside of California.

What is abundantly clear in the high-tech sector is true of virtually all economic clusters. They are organic cultures that benefit from minimal meddling from government. Creating a province that has a healthy and growth-positive economic environment and keeping the regulatory burden manageable is enough of a recipe for success.

Government can only set the table for cluster development by supporting investment in research and development, reducing taxes and creating laws to ensure that failed entrepreneurs are not penalized, then simply get out of the way. As such, schedule 2 of Bill 176 is another excuse to spend public dollars where there's little or no evidence that doing so will create jobs.

It is also absurd to evaluate an economic plan every five years. A real plan is dynamic and is consistently being reassessed and adapted as conditions and circumstances change. We live in a highly networked global economy, and response time is critical. That's the world that start-up businesses and entrepreneurs live in, and that's the world that government needs to understand if it really hopes to make a positive difference to Ontario's various specialized economic clusters. Not only that, but the evaluation of the plan's relative success is not data-driven at all; it's purely anecdotal.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Liberals don't like numbers.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: That's right.

Bill 176 requires that the plans be evaluated by "consulting with persons or entities who have an interest in the development of the cluster, as the minister considers advisable." In order for the minister to deem his plan a success, he or she would merely have to seek out complimentary points of view. With a closed circuit so prone to confirmation bias, what exactly is the point of going into detail about that plan? It would be encouraging to find out if the province's Ministry of Economic Development had enough confidence in its abilities that it would commit to simple data drawn annually from Statistics Canada and third party researchers. I find it regrettable that the success of the province's economic development strategy will be evaluated by consulting with "persons or entities who have an interest in the development of the cluster, as the minister considers advisable."

Subjectivity times self-interest does not equal objectivity.

And, of course—surprise—there are more regulations attached to schedule 2, in section 9:

"The minister may make regulations,

"(a) prescribing requirements with respect to consultation;

"(b) prescribing additional items to be included in a draft plan or a final version of the plan;

"(c) prescribing requirements with respect to the review of a plan;

"(d) prescribing requirements with respect to ceasing the preparation of a plan or amending, revoking or continuing a plan;

"(e) prescribing requirements with respect to making anything public, including timing requirements."

Basically, schedule 2 is an announcement about the intention to make a plan that may be revised, revoked, re-scoped or discarded.

While we're on the matter of regulations, I would like to highlight a couple of priorities flagged by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in the latest edition of its annual strategic review, *Emerging Stronger, 2014*. That report notes: "Business should engage the provincial government and participate constructively in a review of business supports, advocating the retention of those that work and showing a willingness to forgo those that do not.

"The Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services called for a re-evaluation of Ontario's business supports, which total \$3.6 billion in direct and indirect spending. It is unclear whether Ontario's hodgepodge programs are accomplishing their desired objectives, as the data on outcomes is often poor and inconsistent."

Here again, we have an observation about the inadequacies or absence of government performance measures. As this quote makes plain, it was first delivered in 2012 by the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services, what we more commonly call the Drummond commission. That concern was echoed in the Ontario chamber's 2013 *Emerging Stronger* report and again in this year's document.

In response to these reasonable criticisms from esteemed professionals, this government could have opted to commit to a more stringent standard of reporting and evidence-driven policy-making that tracks outcomes, not just inputs and process. And yet, when it comes to laying out a bold economic action plan, this government is apparently still wedded to group hugs and squishy love-ins.

I made reference to a couple of priorities from the *Emerging Stronger* report, which was the result of teamwork from the Ontario chamber and the Mowat Centre. Another priority from that report that I would like to mention relates to the matter of regulation in schedule 1:

"Many regulated professions need to provide a clearer pathway for immigrants. Too often, immigrants are blocked from employment in their chosen occupation by licensing authorities that do not recognize their credentials. As a result, our immigrant system ... forces immigrants to invest considerable resources into retraining so they can find employment in the fields for which they

were originally selected during the immigration process. The Ontario Regulators for Access Consortium's Compendium for Best Practices and the Fairness Commissioner's Exemplary Practice Database (launched in 2013) highlight best practices in foreign credential recognition in the regulated professions. More progress is needed."

Speaker, highlighting best practices is a start, but it is clearly not enough. The problem is not particularly new—it was identified in last year's Emerging Stronger report, after all—and as ambitions go, it is a very worthy one. Why has that challenge not been taken up by this ministry, either in legislation of its own or as a schedule within Bill 176?

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Why, for that matter, does the Emerging Stronger document reference two government-funded agencies identifying practices on regulatory practice? Perhaps that's a box we're better off not opening here today. I suspect that we would fall down a rabbit hole and the time available to us today would quickly disappear.

Instead, I would like to use the mention of best practices as a springboard and relay some of the key takeaways about regulatory review. These were laid out in November 2011 in speeches by Cass Sunstein, who was then serving as administrator of the United States government's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs—OIRA, for short—and is now a professor at Harvard. Perhaps he has had occasions to bump into the former Premier at campus mixers. In any event, these eight key takeaways are part of what Sunstein described as a more enlightened and rational system that promotes good government through reflection and choice.

Two points, in particular, relate to the bill before us this afternoon. I quote from Professor Sunstein's speech on November 30, 2013:

"We know that intuitions ... however compelling they may seem, and however suggestive that regulation is helpful or harmful, are both unreliable, and that advance testing of the effects of rules, as through pilot programs or randomized controlled experiments, can be highly illuminating.

"Continuing scrutiny: We know that it is important to explore the effects of regulation in the real world, to learn whether they are having beneficial consequences or producing unintended harm. In short, we need careful assessments before rules are issued, and we need continuing scrutiny afterwards."

By putting evidence front and centre, the process improves the likelihood that debates such as these remain cool-headed and relatively depoliticized.

As part of OIRA's work, President Obama mandated a government-wide look back at federal regulation, compelling all agencies to re-examine their significant rules, and reduce, improve or eliminate them as the upshot of that examination.

One thing that should appeal to all parties is the latent value freed up through the elimination of useless regulation. In the first two years of OIRA's modern approach to regulation, the Obama administration was able to realize

a net benefit estimated at over \$35 billion. This is the scale of the possibility that is being squandered by lack of ambition. This is the kind of opportunity cost that accompanies government requests to green-light measures that simply perpetuate the same old same old, under a new slogan.

I think at this point, it would perhaps be instructive to remind ourselves of some of the history of this ministry. As fans of the Legislature channel, we remember from previous seasons that the face of government cabinet is prone to change. Sometimes, as we saw just yesterday, the government reshuffles. On top of that, sometimes the cabinet is large and unproductive; sometimes it's lean and efficient. The government is an example of the former; Ontario Progressive Conservatives have committed to the latter.

We would reduce the number of provincial ministries from 24 to 16, and of course, as the cabinet expands or shrinks, ministries are added, amalgamated or mothballed. This is especially true when a new government is formed and is eager to rebrand itself as different from the one that came before.

But sometimes it is part of a wholesale refresh. The Minister of Finance was, of course, at one time known as the Ontario Treasurer of the Ministry of Treasury and Economics. Another artifact of days gone by was the Minister of Industry, Trade and Technology. It was a fairly no-nonsense, meat-and-potatoes title, but as we entered the last decade of this last century, this Legislature set aside that ministry and formalized a new one to take its place.

In 1990, this House passed the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade Act, and because of the focus of the bill in front of us today, I would like to focus on key details from that document that I feel are relevant to Bill 176.

Speaker, I would begin with subsection 4(2) of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade Act:

"Annual report

"(2) The minister after the close of each year shall submit to the Lieutenant Governor in Council an annual report upon the affairs of the ministry and shall then lay the report before the assembly if it is in session or, if not, at the next session."

This underlines the point that I made earlier regarding the creation of annual reports. It is a redundant detail of Bill 176 because the minister is already required to submit an annual report on his ministry's activities. If that yearly account is wanting, it is because the minister has chosen to omit detail.

Moving on to section 6 of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade Act:

"Powers

"6. The minister may, in exercising his or her powers and carrying out his or her duties and functions under this act, assist the private sector by,

"(a) promoting investment and trade opportunities offered by Ontario;

“(b) encouraging the introduction of new technologies, products and processes to improve productivity and competitiveness;

“(c) providing financial assistance and incentives;

“(d) collecting and disseminating information on such aspects of the provincial economy and industries as affect Ontario’s industrial base;

“(e) providing direct services to industry for domestic and foreign sales;

“(f) advocating the interests of the business sector within the government of Ontario, to other Canadian governments and to foreign governments;

“(g) consulting with industry, labour and government authorities to develop programs which help Ontario industry;

“(h) assisting industry in any other manner considered to be proper.”

This is an action list with considerable, virtually comprehensive, scope. In fact, reviewing the provisions contained with this act reveals that the measures that have been in place since 1990 already enable the minister to conduct himself in the manner described in Bill 176.

This legislation is not required. If the minister feels that his ministry is ill-equipped, he is also empowered to form advisory committees and appoint their chairs and vice-chairs.

Moreover, section 2 of Bill 176 specifies that the Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment “may prepare plans with respect to the development of clusters”—not “shall”; “may prepare plans.” Under Bill 176, taking action is optional. Even while he claims to be setting the bar higher, the minister has given himself an easy out. In short, nothing here is what it seems.

Early in my remarks, I mentioned that certain legislation is empty, ineffective or deceptive. Bill 176 is perhaps all three.

Aside from the technical circumstances I have levelled at this bill, I would say that one of the other disappointing things about this proposed legislation is the way it drapes itself in the language of partnership even as it is delivering a political wedge.

As I have said, Bill 176 is an empty and frivolous bill on a weighty and serious matter. Ontario’s economy, its businesses and workers, our children and grandchildren deserve better than this bill.

The action items contained within Bill 176 do not require additional legislation in order to become reality; simply a government with vision and willpower. Even if you dispute that claim and feel that Bill 176 fills a legislative void, this bill is constructed so loosely that it amounts to absolutely nothing.

By putting us in a position to vote against what they will claim to be measures to ensure greater accountability, strengthen red tape reporting requirements and invigorating economic cluster development—all of which falls apart the moment you tune out the Liberal talking points and look at what is actually contained in this bill—the contents of this legislation are in contradiction to the title for political purposes. If opposition members vote

against this empty, ineffective legislation, as seems highly probable, the government will be able to say we voted against the Better Business Climate Act. But as a matter of fact, the act doesn’t really do anything to improve the province’s business climate. It doesn’t create a single private sector job. It doesn’t touch the real issues or cost drivers that are universally considered by those investing in Ontario. The content of this bill makes a mockery of its title.

1700

I would argue that Bill 176 is designed simply to wedge the official opposition by suggesting that we are voting against what this government will doubtless describe as no-nonsense measures to reduce regulation and create economic partnerships. Again, Bill 176 gives the minister an extravagant amount of leeway for defining what constitutes a burden. If passed, it will allow the ministry to cherry-pick examples of burden reduction while simultaneously failing to address legitimate problems on a larger scale. The short title might just as well be the Liberal Lip Service Act. That is, frankly, outrageous.

Red tape costs Ontario businesses as much as \$11 billion annually in lost productivity. It impacts households as well.

Our economy faces real challenges. It doesn’t need gimmickry and more fat contracts. Real action is necessary, not just empty promises. I had hoped—

Interjection.

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Okay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Michael Prue): Questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I did listen intently to the member from Burlington. I have to agree with some of the aspects in terms of ending this regulatory burden that we regularly feel in this House. It speaks to the dislocation between the speech that was read and the bill that is supposed to be debated here today.

I’ll simply reference three spots where I find that dislocation. First, they bemoan the loss of manufacturing jobs but champion increased free trade and interprovincial trade, with portions of deregulation making the vast components of those free trade agreements. I can tell you, as a cluster, Windsor and Essex county used to be the hub of manufacturing. Those jobs are no longer clustered; they are fragmented and they have gone to the lowest-wage jurisdictions on the planet because of enhanced free trade, open markets and globalization. That doesn’t make sense to me.

Second, again in terms of the regulatory burden that we see in this place, prior to us debating this bill, the member from Renfrew introduced a regulation, an amendment to the Highway Traffic Act that essentially, as I heard the explanatory note, would exclude vehicles with snow on them from driving on the highway. That’s a regulation that they just introduced. I wonder how that will affect the businesses in this province. You can’t have snow on your vehicle if you want to go on the highway. That’s quite interesting.

The third would be the fact that Stephen Harper is the champion of deregulation. I would imagine that he is. This is also the Prime Minister who just increased the price of a stamp by 57%. That's certainly going to affect businesses in our country.

I would say this: Please, connect the dots. Regulation is a burden because it is supposed to be burdensome. We do have to take a look at duplication in regulation, but, my goodness, make a coherent argument when you're talking about it.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: When I was in high school, corporate tax rates were about 47%. Today, they're about 23%. For our generation, income taxes—as I told you, I did my mother's income tax and then compared it to mine. My father paid 25% more income tax when I was in high school than I do today. Our sales taxes are at an all-time low—the lowest corporate taxes in generations; the lowest income taxes in generations.

To the member for Burlington: You are in one of the lowest-taxed jurisdictions in the world overall. Our generation, unlike our parents' and our grandparents', pays less taxes. So that's nonsense.

Second of all, we have the most educated population in the western world. We've taken the infrastructure spending in this province, from the time when her party was in power—and I'd like her to listen to this—which was a measly \$1.4 billion, to now \$14 billion—\$1.4 billion. According to the OECD, that's less than 3% of the amount of spending that you need to maintain economic growth. That's where they would take you. We could balance our books tomorrow if we spent at the same measly, crappy level of under-investing in our education and health care systems.

The highest infrastructure spending since Drew was Premier; the highest level of education. What did they do? Not only did they massively disinvest—a 90% overall reduction in the average spending of previous Conservative governments—they massively reduced the spending on post-secondary education.

Mr. Speaker, we've added 160,000 places in trades—the largest expansion of the public education system since Bill Davis.

Our economic job growth is 440%; 80% of those jobs require a university or college education. It's the best job creation rate in the western world for a manufacturing economy and the highest percentage of jobs that are high-skilled jobs. These are not McJobs, but she wouldn't know that because she isn't economically competent, nor is her party or her leader.

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

Mr. John O'Toole: I do want to pay some respect to the member from Burlington, Ms. McKenna. I have great respect for her spending an hour on this bill and reading over 50 pages of notes that were timely prepared. Her colleague from Huron-Bruce as well—I know they've worked hard on the two issues in this bill. There are only

two sections in the bill. I think you did a remarkable job explaining it, and I commend you for drawing attention.

I should put on the record that two of the famous quotes that she used will go down in history as quite complementary to your insights. One of them was that this bill does nothing more than create more red tape. That's extremely important, because this bill is only five pages. In fact, it's only two and a half pages in English and two and a half pages in French, and to spend an hour on it is quite an achievement.

Her other quote is that the bill is simply lip service, in the act. It's Liberal lip service, and that's a true statement as well. If you look at the two sections of the bill—I think the viewers would be wise to get a copy of Hansard; in fact, it would be twice the size of the bill itself, because the bill itself is really, as she said, lip service. There's no action in here. The minister does not have to do anything, but he may create regulations. I think you made that argument as well.

Schedule 1 in itself has four statements on making regulation powers, and in schedule 2 there are five particular prescribed requirements in creating regulations. So in fact, your first general statement that it creates more red tape in itself is absolutely borne out by looking at the bill itself.

It really comes down to a simple measurement of how you think the government is doing. The people watching today should ask themselves, are you better off after 10 years of the McGuinty-Wynne government? I know the answer is no, but I think you should look carefully. This bill is another sham.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thanks for the opportunity just to speak to this briefly.

You heard earlier today in question period about the loss of another manufacturing facility in my riding, in the riding of Welland. JMC Steel out of the US is idling its factory. We hear that around the province week after week. We hear about businesses idling their operations or closing their doors. The member from Windsor-Essex spoke about this and about the Conservative policies on free trade. In this particular instance, it's the dumping of cheap Korean steel into Canada at a price that is considerably lower than we can even buy raw material in this province and across this country. That's because of low wages and low production costs abroad.

I think the Liberal government, instead of spending their time on Bill 176, the Better Business Climate Act, would be better using their time if they actually talked about a better business retention act in this province. They should spend their time reducing hydro rates, coming up with a plan to reduce hydro rates, because as we're giving our hydro away to the US, our businesses are following. Municipalities are offering incentives. They're giving companies free taxes for 10 years, and they get their hydro rates at a fraction of the price that our businesses in Ontario have to pay—another impact to the JMC Steel factory in my riding.

The employees in my riding say that the government should be spending their time—not just the federal government. We need a national manufacturing strategy, for sure, but the provincial government as well needs to do their part in lobbying the federal government to make sure that these kinds of manufacturing facilities don't continue to close week after week across this province.

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

Mrs. Jane McKenna: Thank you, Speaker. Sorry, my throat is sore today.

First of all, we clearly hit a nerve with the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Facts are facts.

1710

Well-run provinces attract well-run businesses. The Ontario Progressive Conservative Party has suggested a range of ideas to kick-start economic growth. We would simplify the tax code and allow companies to deduct capital costs the same year the money was spent. We would implement a new tax credit for investors to help expand start-up companies.

Government should not pick winners and losers, and bureaucrats should not be making decisions about doling out funds to private companies. In seeking to map out the dynamic possibilities of partnership, it neglects the opportunities right in front of it. Stakeholders that have been name-checked in the course of bringing this legislation forward—stellar organizations such as the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Toronto Region Board of Trade and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business—have a depth and breadth of knowledge that could help to enrich the government's own knowledge base. Even the backbench cheerleaders concede that there is work to be done.

Ontario's economy is not performing at anything near its true potential, and it is incumbent upon the members of this government, which has held office now for 11 years, to stop laying blame elsewhere and own their responsibilities as well as seize the possibilities of this moment in history.

I support Ontario businesses and workers, and the Ontario PC Party is going to stand up and do what has to be done to make this province not a have-not province.

Also, for the last seven years we've been above the national average for unemployment. Our kids, our youth—16%. What are we doing in this province? This is for our next generation, our children, to have a life that they deserve, not to have a government that does lip service and creates more regulatory burdens for businesses that are suffocating and dying here in Ontario.

We need a government of the Ontario PC Party to turn this province around, with Tim Hudak to make it the best it can possibly be. We've done it in the past; we're going to do it in the future. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is a pleasure and an honour to get up in this House and talk about Bill 176, the Better Business Climate Act, 2014. I actually want to extend a

thank you; yesterday I did have a technical briefing on this piece of legislation. The staff from the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade came to the office—their research, policy and political staff—and I thought that we had a fairly productive conversation about why this legislation is in front of us and what the principles are that are driving it, if you will.

The bill arrived at second reading very quickly; I think that needs to be said. It made it a challenge for us who are on this portfolio to actually reach out to stakeholders in the business community about what they think about the bill. I am looking forward to actually going out and sharing the bill with a number of clusters that are in the Kitchener–Waterloo area, in the Niagara area, in the Welland area, and getting some real feedback about what this means on the ground for those businesses.

I do also want to say that in many respects this legislation is somewhat contradictory. You have one section, the burden reporting act component, and then you have the other side, which is the partners for jobs and growth, which actually has some burdens attached to it. I think that it's safe to say that the NDP caucus has some outstanding questions about this piece of legislation, and I'm going to work through some of the issues that we see.

The first part of the act: The cumulative regulatory burden on businesses in Ontario has risen to become, at least from the perspective of business, the number one economic development issue.

In fact, just prior to coming down to the House for duty today, I was meeting with a company that is focused on green energy, and they identified very clearly that they would welcome one portal to advocate for their businesses across the province instead of dealing with ministry after ministry after ministry. It's time-consuming, it's costly and it actually is a burden to do business in the province of Ontario. They made that point very clearly to me.

It's interesting because in Bill 176 the issue of publishing an annual report detailing what the government has done about unnecessary regulation is a small but positive step. I think everyone will acknowledge that the regulatory burden is real.

The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington just showed me the provincial offences book from 2012. It is 3,500 pages long. It's a huge book. The problem with the government is that they add regulations and they don't release it.

In the briefing yesterday, I asked how we're going to measure whether or not we are being successful in reducing the burdens. I was told very clearly by the staff that they have set a goal of reducing one per ministry per year and having to go through that. I must wonder how they're going to choose which burden. How do you measure which one is most burdensome? So there are some challenges with that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: They're a beast of burden.

Ms. Catherine Fife: A beast of burden, yes—and it's a good Rolling Stones song.

There are some outstanding questions about what that's going to look like. I was told, though, that there is a report and maybe—this is my portfolio. I haven't seen this report yet. It's called *Fewer Burdens, Greater Growth*. This is, I guess, another study. It happened and another report is out there which highlights how we can reduce burdens by \$6 million a year. So I'm going to read that because I think that's my responsibility to do it. This was also championed by the Open for Business folks at economic development and trade. However, there is far more that government can do. I think we can all agree on that.

According to the chamber of commerce, the following is also worth considering, so we are obviously going to try to inform this debate with some suggestions: publishing the rationale for any new regulations the government introduces, so having a rationale as to why these regulatory burdens are in front of us—I would love to know if that actually happens; conducting a public and transparent cost-benefit analysis when considering new regulations; and supporting outcomes-based models of regulation.

Given the fact that that book there is 3,500 pages long, clearly that has not been happening. So I think there is a practice of just adding to the regulations and not actually going through those 3,500 pages in a systemic way.

Streamline approval and compliance procedures between levels of government, specifically in the area of environmental assessments—there are some very contradictory practices within the environment ministry, and that's because we have not kept pace with the research that is out there. And there are some good intentional regs that exist, but they run counter to other pieces of legislation.

I am even thinking about how municipalities plan. There's the good *Places to Grow Act*, and a place like Waterloo region was highlighted for high intensification in the core, for instance, and yet the OMB just made a decision that said, "No, you don't have to do that. You can continue to build homes out on the outskirts and contribute to the sprawl, contribute to the infrastructure costs and contribute to the negative environmental impact of that kind of planning." So there are inconsistencies that exist within legislation and within regulation.

That's why, in many respects, it's a walking contradiction. This piece of legislation has a reducing burdens piece, but then it also has this other aspect, which I'm going to touch on in a second, around cluster development. It's really interesting, the collaborative competition principle, which is, I guess, driving the cluster development. I will say, though, that the cluster model is an effective way to bring shared knowledge and shared resources together, but we will question why you need a piece of legislation to actually make that happen. But I'm going to get into that in a second.

Adopt a consultative and evidence-based approach to establishing regulations—I think people think that this does happen at committee as we review legislation. Generally, people—there are some active listening skills that

happen and people feel that they have been listened to, but then I don't think it actually translates so much into action.

Similarly, we would like to hear in more detail about the process that will be used for identifying which regulations are ineffective and can be removed. I'm pretty sure that the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington could give you a quick short list, right here, right now, and I'm sure he would really enjoy that process. I don't think the government would enjoy that process that much.

1720

We want to ensure that the regulations which would be removed as a result of the implementation of this act would actually benefit businesses, as is the intention of this bill. The staff that I did meet in the technical briefing—I do believe that they think that this is a good way to create a better, more positive climate for businesses in the province of Ontario. It really is in the details and in the implementation of the legislation.

I do think that the government is, after many years, now pushing to address red tape that they have actually been a part of creating. As the bill exists at present, there is not a clear outline of who or which body will be in charge of ensuring that the reductions to regulations are meaningful and helpful for businesses. This is why the consultation piece is so important: because we do know that government doesn't always do the best job, regardless of what the government is. I think that it's fair to say that businesses feel that they are living and breathing this business climate in the province of Ontario and that they have the knowledge which should inform policy and legislation.

We would like to know how the Ministry of Economic Development plans to work with the other ministries to identify areas of regulation which are particularly burdensome. That is a missing piece in this legislation. It's great for the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade to say, "These are our goals and we're going to do this," but how does that translate and trickle out to the rest of the other ministries? Where are the barriers for businesses within those other ministries?

Will the ministry involve stakeholders in the decision-making? We, of course, always fight for this. We've heard from stakeholders on issues such as the toxic substances list. The New Democrats have always supported health and safety. Actually, we've had some good success in this session to push the government to follow through on some of the safety regulations, in particular falls prevention, which was in the Dean report from 2010. It does appear that things may be happening—not fast enough for my liking, but they are nevertheless happening.

However, back to health and safety: In some cases, we realize that regulations can be arbitrary. A farmer must be able to plan her or his resources in advance of the season. If a substance is limited after a farmer has already entered into a contract with a supplier, it poses a significant financial challenge to the farmer. Farmers are not

shy. I think that we can all agree on that. When they come to lobby, their frustration over the inconsistencies in legislation and regulations is profound. Farming should not be a complex, layered sector that is filled with red tape. In fact, based on this legislation, if we did have a farming cluster we could probably just apply the same principles applied to farming to other sectors. We ask, therefore, that stakeholders be included in the discussions and play a significant role in the decision-making process of which regulations to change or eliminate.

The burden piece: Obviously, we all have shared concerns around that. Then the partnership for jobs and growth—this is in the technical briefing. I did ask. I said, “So assuming there’s a cluster, theoretically, of, say, advanced manufacturing or a tech cluster, for instance, for KW, why would they come to the government and enter into a collaborative competition discussion about what they would need as a cluster?” Right now, clusters actually already lobby the government in a fairly coordinated way. Kitchener–Waterloo, for instance, has been actively lobbying this government for quite some time to ensure that they have the transit funding and the infrastructure to truly be successful. They’ve referred to it as innovative regional economies and strategic infrastructure. Their recommendation is a 10-year capital allocation for rail infrastructure that must be established by the province of Ontario and the government of Canada to support two-way GO train service on the Kitchener line—the CN North Mainline—in the 2014 provincial-federal capital budget.

In this instance, even though the Premier did come to Kitchener–Waterloo and made the promise of two-way, and even though that really isn’t two-way—because we’re not taking people from Toronto and getting them to Kitchener–Waterloo, which really is what two-way is about. You have an additional train in the morning and an additional train at night. That is not what the cluster, for instance, is requesting. They have made a very strong business case that Toronto and Kitchener–Waterloo, which represent some of the best regions for start-ups in Canada—that the Toronto–Kitchener–Waterloo corridor is comparable to Silicon Valley in size and population, the difference being that Silicon Valley has a regional rail service.

I’m trying to just work through what this would look like. If they came to the minister and said, “Okay, we want to be part of this new cluster strategy,” they are almost handing over some sort of autonomy, local autonomy, by saying that the minister would make available to the public an annual report with respect to actions taken by the government and then also by the cluster. The minister may make regulations respecting the report. I understand in principle that this formalizes some sort of a relationship between the cluster in the province and then the government.

Ms. Cindy Forster: What does the cluster get out of it?

Ms. Catherine Fife: That’s the question. What does the cluster get out of formalizing this relationship? I did ask that at the technical briefing.

My feeling on the whole is that this legislation is not really for the clusters in the province of Ontario; it’s to push the ministry really into the 21st century on economic development and to sort of formalize an approach by the minister around job creation and around cluster development. There’s not a lot of upside to this relationship on the cluster side. So there’s a plan that would be created:

“2. The minister may prepare plans with respect to the development of clusters....

“3. A plan with respect to the development of a cluster shall include the following:

“1. A description of the cluster.” If the cluster came to the minister, I think they know how to describe themselves; I think they know who they are.

“2. An assessment of challenges and opportunities with respect to the development of a cluster.” I think that if they have already existed and they are already advocating, for instance, transit, two-way GO, they already know what the barriers and issues are.

“3. The objectives and intended outcomes of the plan.”

Most of the people who are affiliated with the Kitchener–Waterloo tech cluster, for instance, don’t need a plan from the minister. They have a good sense of what they need to get accomplished. They would like some stability. They would like to know what the playing field is like in the province of Ontario, and of course, the most pivotal piece for them is to have transit and to have that infrastructure.

Ms. Cindy Forster: They don’t need legislation.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So that is the question.

“4. Performance measures to evaluate whether the objectives and intended outcomes of the plan are being achieved.” This is already happening. The tech cluster in Kitchener–Waterloo is incredibly resilient. They know who they are. They know what their community is. They just don’t know how to get some of their employees from Toronto to Kitchener–Waterloo in a very safe and fast way.

“5. A description of actions that could be taken by the minister, or the businesses or other entities that form the cluster, to assist in the achievement of the objectives and intended outcomes of the plan.”

You can see the irony here, I hope. I hope I haven’t lost everybody; I’m trying to make this as interesting as possible. One part of the act says that you’re going to reduce the burden of regulations, and then the other half of the act says, “But we’re going to create all these rules and regulations to make sure that you clusters know what the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade is all about.” To the best of my knowledge, I can’t see why they would do that. I think it would be safe to say that they would have to build up some trust. The rules of engagement would have to be very clear. As they stand right now, I don’t think that they are that clear.

Establishing a five-year plan for these clusters and how they engage with the government—I think it would be better to start it off perhaps as a pilot project, because to go whole-scale across the province, when I think it's safe to say that the government does not have a very strong record on job creation, is a big challenge. Right? So you would really have to sell it. There would have to be a pretty good marketing strategy. Usually, when you have a group of people who are looking to collaborate, it just doesn't happen in and of itself. There has to be something that incentivizes it.

1730

For instance, what's already happening in Kitchener–Waterloo, in the tech sector, is that they provide mentorship, and there is some social infrastructure and physical infrastructure like space and technology. There really is a supportive community. I'm a little concerned about how the ministry would be imposed on that, when I think that it's already working as it stands right now. Perhaps there is, for instance, a food processing cluster that would be looking for some guidance and looking for some cohesion and a way to coordinate their efforts, but it can't really be a top-down sort of model.

I've reviewed some of the chamber's recommendations as stated in the act, and for New Democrats this is a real source of concern. I want to be clear: New Democrats appreciate the value to society of effective, results-oriented environmental, consumer and labour regulations. There are good regulations out there.

There could actually be some stronger regulations in some sectors like the construction industry, for instance. I just took a meeting this morning, and I think it's very clear that there is a major issue in the province of Ontario with the underground economy. It's estimated at anywhere between \$3 billion and \$6 billion in lost revenue, never mind the risk to consumers and the risk to workers who work in that economy. In the construction sector, the oversight could definitely be better. The supports could be better, and the regulations could be clearer and more simple—

Ms. Cindy Forster: And enforced.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And enforced. Thank you. That's excellent.

However, there is a growing sense in the business community that Ontario's economic growth is being held back by ineffective, overlapping and sometimes unnecessary regulation.

Again on this side of the House, we know that there are good regulations—regulations that keep Ontario safe, regulations that protect workers, regulations that truly protect the environment. That said, the overwhelming sense from the business community is that Ontario does not have an outcome-based regulatory approach, and New Democrats believe that this perspective needs to be taken seriously. I guess the question is, does Bill 176 truly address this, or can it be amended to be stronger or to be more streamlined?

That leads us back to clustering. This bill also makes some proposals on supporting economic clustering. As

I've said, I'm not going to argue against the wisdom of clustering. It's an idea that does make sense. It is an idea that is working in parts of Ontario right now. There is something in Boston, and I think there's something in Chicago. Montreal has been listed. You can see that the concept of clustering is gaining momentum already across the province. However, my question is, does the Ministry of Economic Development require legislation to do work that many would assume it's already doing? I think that is really the fundamental question as to whether or not we would support this piece of legislation or not. I think that you've heard very clearly from the PC caucus that they want nothing to do with it. Of course, they haven't really wanted anything to do with any of the budgets either, and they've missed opportunities over the last two and half years to get anything done. So I don't think that we should be surprised that the PC caucus has taken this approach.

Mr. Randy Hillier: We like to be consistent.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You are consistently not reading budgets.

I know that there are members of the PC caucus who would have actually liked to use the leverage of being in a minority government to, for instance, champion the rights of those with disabilities. I know that for sure. I'm sure that there are some economic strategies that the PC caucus would have liked to engage in through that budget process. But for some reason, they decided to not go down that road.

The legislation indicates that the minister must now introduce a plan for a cluster. I am assuming that there is some interest at this point on behalf of a cluster, and then the minister introduces a plan. But there are no specifics about how an area, either geographic or economic, would be selected.

Actually, this is an interesting point. When I had the technical briefing, I asked, how is the southwestern development fund or the eastern development fund or the rural economic development fund—how is that going to interact with this strategy? I think that, also, to be fair, is an outstanding question.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Monte will answer when he does his two minutes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Okay, that's good. Maybe Monte will let me know.

Would already existing clusters be supported in an official capacity as a cluster or would new areas be selected and promoted? Who would be consulted on these decisions? How would these decisions be made? It's all very unclear, I think. To be fair, as well, we have never seen a piece of legislation specifically like this, especially with the two contradictory pieces.

Clustering isn't a new idea, though. The PC caucus is going to find this really interesting because you just spoke out against this piece of legislation. For the record, the Ministry of Economic Development announced plans to fund a biotechnology innovation program cluster in Ontario in 2003. I have the press release from that. Essentially, it would start the first phase of the Biotech-

nology Cluster Innovation Program—this happened in 2003. The BCIP, otherwise known as the Biotechnology Cluster Innovation Program, was part of the Eves government—a \$51-million biotechnology strategy that also included the medical and related sciences. So 11 years ago, the idea of clustering was actually raised by the PC caucus, sort of at the same time as the Liberals: at the end of an eight-year stint at that time.

The idea of clustering has actually been on the books for a long time. I think that it's taken off outside of this House. I think my fellow critic has made the case that maybe it should just stay out of this House. That said, the Eves government introduced the concept 11 years ago. Don't you find that interesting? Nothing? I don't know.

I'm going to take a step back and speak about clustering more broadly. Clustering, as it is described—aligning skilled people, research institutions and corporate collaborations to build innovative ecosystems—represents a significant opportunity to enhance economic growth across sectors of Ontario's economy. I fully, fully support that statement. I believe that if we could actually connect our academic institutions, commercialize the research, reduce the burden, to actually put sometimes government-funded research into play, especially, for instance, in the health care system—I mean, there are so many examples of research that the government has invested in, has supported, but then there are all these other barriers to getting that government-funded, government-researched and government-signed-off project into play, into the province. It's one of those very cynical, frustrated places people find themselves in when they have a really good idea and they have a piece of technology, actually, which would definitely help the people of this province, and people can't access it. Really, it's very frustrating.

The idea of clustering focuses on the competitive advantage over the comparative advantage, or increasing productivity through innovation instead of taking advantage of geography or circumstances to overcome input costs. The concept was introduced by Michael Porter of Harvard Business School and advanced more recently by such Canadian scholars as David Wolfe, David Robinson and Matthew Lucas. I know well the advantages that are gained by businesses operating in Kitchener-Waterloo in the tech sector, especially. The proximity of innovative firms, incredible universities and of talented, trained young people has spurred the tech ecosystem we all talk so much about. However, other regions of Canada have flourishing clusters as well and have been doing a great deal more to promote their clusters, supporting them through policy and investment.

When the member from Essex did his two-minute hit on the previous speaker—there are some very quick ways to actually stimulate the economy that are in front of us, really. I know from meeting with the young entrepreneurs at Communitech, for instance, or Velocity or Sandbox in Kitchener-Waterloo, that often these start-ups can access angel funding—family and friends—but it's taking that business to the next stage. They are desperate

for venture capital. If we could just figure out a way to get some of that dead money which corporations are sitting on and put some of that money into play, you would see a massive spring-back of the economy. Those are big ideas, but they certainly, in many respects, make a little bit more sense of formalizing a cluster government relationship-building exercise.

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We could talk a little about some of the other clusters, but we're not going to. In Ontario, though, I do see a tremendous amount of potential in Kitchener-Waterloo's tech sector, in the financial services sector in Toronto, and in the development of an advanced manufacturing sector in Hamilton and London, but these clusters need a government that supports them.

I will agree with the member from Burlington and the member from Welland when you talked about hydro rates. I just spent Monday meeting with businesses in Kitchener Centre and Kitchener-Waterloo. One owner, Yvonne from the Cake Box, sat down and talked in very real terms as a small business owner about how the hydro rates are affecting her. She's in the baking business, so obviously hydro is a major issue for her. She said very clearly, "I have had to reduce my staff hours. I have had to pull back. That's the only place where I can find the savings." And she has reduced her baking times, which obviously affects productivity. So it's very cyclical. The issue of high hydro rates is all connected. It's obviously connected.

Ontario can also support clusters by other means, like creating the infrastructure that businesses need. That's why I touched on the two-way, all-day GO service. I think that if I went through the history of how that announcement was made last week in my riding and how it's still being referred to as two-way, all-day, when it is not—even the commercials are running, paid for by the Liberal Party of Ontario. Just because you put it in an ad or just because you stand up in this House and say it's so does not make it so. I think that it's really important for people to understand that two-way, all-day means that that train takes people back and forth from Kitchener and Waterloo, including people from Toronto to Kitchener-Waterloo in the morning because there are jobs there. There are jobs in Kitchener-Waterloo and there is a lack of transit options for them to get to Kitchener-Waterloo.

If we truly want to support clusters and support that innovative spirit of business in the province of Ontario, then we have to get the transit piece right. We absolutely do. It has to be affordable, it has to be accessible, and it has to work for the people who need it the most. Not everybody has a car and not everybody can afford to get on that 401 and waste five, maybe six hours sitting in traffic. It's just not an option.

You do wonder why we have a productivity issue: It's because we are stuck in traffic. Obviously, when the Premier came to Kitchener-Waterloo and made this announcement, she was selling an idea that actually is not on the books yet. That's why we have made a commitment to follow through on the municipal and tech cluster,

if you will, and cost out that infrastructure project to make sure that that north line is working and is part of our transit plan.

We have some outstanding questions about Bill 176. I do appreciate the intention of it. Of course, we do feel that the business community and climate in the province of Ontario could be better. We are looking for creative solutions to make that happen. I'll be looking forward to the debate to see how we can actually make sure that a piece of legislation such as this—it may not be this—looks to be effective for the people that it's aiming to help and to grow.

With that, I think I will conclude my comments. Once again, I would like to thank the staff from the ministry for their technical briefing. I think that our work is cut out for us in the province of Ontario to ensure that we actually do have a positive business community, and that if clusters are part of that model going forward, the government knows their role. The clusters and the businesses know what the rules of engagement are, preferably a targeted tax credit, like the job creator tax credit, which for some reason this government refused to incorporate or embrace, even though it's working for other sectors, like Ohio, which courted away the Heinz company for \$520,000.

There are real solutions—low-hanging-fruit solutions, even, if you will. I've provided some questions and I've provided some solutions, and I guess we'll see who's listening.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to thank my friend from Kitchener–Waterloo for her very thoughtful intervention. We've had this conversation in debate in the House about the manufacturing economy. The government's view of this is that the manufacturing economy is critical, but it's changing, much as agriculture changed from 100 years ago continuing to be a foundational part of the Ontario economy, to now less labour-intensive. We produce our food with many fewer people than we did in the first 60 or 70 years.

I've always given the example—people talk about losing 300,000 manufacturing jobs. If we had not gone through modernization, we wouldn't have that manufacturing there.

I listened to the member from Welland. Earlier, the member from Welland was talking about a plant. I give the example of Pittsburgh. In 1983 and 1984, Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania saw 104 of 104 steel plants close; 243,000 people in a city of 700,000 people lost their jobs. Today, Pittsburgh produces more steel than it ever has in its history. Do you know how many plants it has? Not 104; it has two. Do you know how many people work in the steel industry in Pittsburgh? Not 243,000, but about 300. Pittsburgh is the biggest steel producer with that, when over half the population of the city worked in the industry.

Wallaceburg, Ontario, under the Conservative government, lost 4,000 jobs in a community of 11,000. Why?

Was it some terrible thing Mike Harris did? No; the economy changed. The tool-and-die industry in Wallaceburg, under the opposition party's watch, collapsed. At the time, I spoke at your convention and gave that as an example.

We have created 440,000 jobs in the innovation space because we have an innovation economy. The production economy is changing to highly automated robotics, and we're producing more stuff. So can we just be honest about that with each other?

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciated the comments that we heard from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. I found it intriguing that she pointed out the flip-flop within Bill 176 onto itself. To use her words, on one side, the Liberal government is talking about reducing burden and, on the other side, they're talking about creating clusters in regulations to prop up that concept. I thought there was rich irony in that.

When we talk about reducing burden, I have to segue over to her comments on agriculture. I totally agree with the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. Farmers are not shy. Over the last few weeks, when we've been attending round tables, it's been very interesting to hear that the farmers' number one issue and the number one thing they are asking of us here at the Ontario Legislative Assembly is to, for goodness sakes, start reducing the burden of red tape.

In fact, there was one particular farmer who outlined very specifically how he has to interact with nine different ministries to conduct his business. That's why we said in 2011, and we're consistent today, that we would create one window for farmers to work with and use that as an example of how else we can enable business to be better in Ontario.

In my last few seconds, I'd also like to touch on the fact that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo talked about the underground economy and that we have to do more to ensure that that underground economy does not grow. I couldn't help but think of my colleague from Simcoe North. If he was here, he would say—number one thing, abolish the College of Trades. An example would be the fast-tracking of licensing of carpenters. Nothing more will drive an economy underground than the further burden of ridiculous legislation, and I was pleased to point that out today.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: Once again, it's an honour to be able to rise in this House. It was an honour to be able to listen to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. It was very thoughtful. She gave very thoughtful remarks regarding the bill that has been presented today.

I'd like to focus on the regulatory burden. In this bill, if I heard correctly, there is one regulation per year per ministry.

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Mr. Randy Hillier: Yes, that's a heavy workload. That's a big burden.

Mr. John Vanthof: That could be very effective. I am not discounting that; it could be could be very effective. But who picks the regulation? If it's just a checked box of, "Let's pick the easiest one to get rid of"—because some regulations are actually beneficial. Who picks the regulation?

Another deep-seated problem we have is, who ensures that the regulatory burden is moved along through the process? Part of the problem is not even the regulatory burden itself; it's the process part. If you find the right person in the right ministry, you can move things along, but if you can't find that person and you get transferred—I have people in my riding, farmers, business people, who want to do things, and they get transferred from person to person. It's the same position, but different people. So just taking one regulation per year per ministry and saying, "Oh, yes, we're fixing things," Speaker, is not what's happening.

I think the member from Kitchener–Waterloo did a good job of explaining things we could make better. There are some good things that we could look at with this bill, but there are much bigger problems out there than just one regulation per ministry per year, and "We'll pick the easiest one," because sometimes we have to pick the most effective one, not just the easiest one.

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

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I want to commend the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. I really enjoyed her presentation. I think she was bang on in many of the things that she was saying.

I also want to comment on the fact that I keep hearing doom and gloom over on the other side. I'm out there in the real world, and I can tell you, the Premier and I were at a plant, a bakery—you were talking about a bakery. We were at a plant on Monday where this bakery produces two million bagels a day and two million croissants a day. They have 1,200 employees. They are expanding, a huge addition to their plant. They transport all over the world, and 80% of their products go overseas. It is an incredible story. It was started out by two people who at one time were earning \$3.25 an hour. As I say, now they've got 1,200 employees.

When you take a look at our financial sector, it ranks—the actual number is third in North America and 11th globally in competitive ratings for global financial centres. I can tell you this: The World Economic Forum did a survey of all the banks in the world—not as to size, but as to liquidity, ratios, governance—and decided that out of the top 10 in the world, three of them were in Canada, which meant they were in Toronto, which is the financial centre.

The biotechnology sector: You take a look at a company like Sanofi Pasteur right here in Toronto. They have a world mandate for the Salk vaccine. They're the only

people in the world who manufacture the Salk vaccine. They are expanding. They have global mandates for many of their products. Take a look in your areas. In Guelph, companies like Linamar, companies like Magna, world leaders in innovation and auto parts.

We have a lot to look to, and we sort of denigrate everything that's going on and say, "Oh, it's all going to hell in a hand basket, and what are you going to do about it?" There really are great things happening in Ontario.

We can do better in some areas. We have an issue where the Minister of Transportation was talking about—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo has two minutes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I want to thank the Minister of Infrastructure and the members from Huron–Bruce, Timiskaming–Cochrane and, of course, York Centre for their feedback.

I think the question is, though, is this legislation going to be effective? We should look through that lens when we look at every piece of legislation—or can it actually be amended to be effective? My job is to raise some questions about that.

I thank the member from York Centre for raising some good examples of what's happening. There are good things, obviously, happening in the province of Ontario. In Kitchener–Waterloo there is such a resilient spirit around start-ups and around moving towards advanced manufacturing, but I will say that it does appear in many respects that this Liberal government has truly given up on manufacturing, because there is a disconnect between the research and the innovation piece and modernizing the manufacturing sector. We still need to make things in the province of Ontario.

We should be championing the food processing field. We have the best farmers, the best agriculture. We should be advancing this cause. It should be more focused on creating a cluster and having the Minister of Economic Development develop a five-year plan. I truly question whether or not that is needed.

What we do need to do is address hydro and we do need to address the red tape and the regulation. There must be a faster way to address those 3,500 pages of regulations.

I was touring the Brick brewery last Friday. That's a manufacturing business that, against all odds and in the face of policies put forward by this government that are actually stopping them from hiring more people, is producing some of the best products in the province of Ontario.

I agree: Advanced manufacturing can be successful in the province of Ontario. The question is, will Bill 176 help or hinder it?

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being four minutes to 6, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1756.

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Rob Leone, Amrit Mangat
Taras Natyshak, Jerry J. Ouellette
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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
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France Gélinas, Helena Jaczek
Bill Mauro, Phil McNeely
Norm Miller, John O'Toole
Jagmeet Singh
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permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Catherine Fife
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Catherine Fife, John Fraser
Monte Kwinter, Jane McKenna
Rick Nicholls, Peter Tabuns
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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la politique sociale**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Ted Chudleigh
Bas Balkissoon, Ted Chudleigh
Mike Colle, Vic Dhillon
Cheri DiNovo, Ernie Hardeman
Rod Jackson, Helena Jaczek
Paul Miller
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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des services aux personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Christine Elliott
Laura Albanese, Bas Balkissoon
Cheri DiNovo, Christine Elliott
Mitzie Hunter, Rod Jackson
Sylvia Jones, Monique Taylor
Soo Wong
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