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Wednesday 18 February 2015

Mercredi 18 février 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO**

Wednesday 18 February 2015

**ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO**

Mercredi 18 février 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

**ONTARIO IMMIGRATION ACT, 2015
LOI DE 2015 SUR L'IMMIGRATION
EN ONTARIO**

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 4, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / *Projet de loi 49, 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?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Good morning, Speaker. It's good to be back in the Legislative Assembly. I know we did a lot of hard work as MPPs back in our ridings, and it's kind of a bittersweet return. It's good to be here, but it's also nice to be home and do the real work that we're elected to do with our constituents.

Today it's a pleasure to rise as the MPP for London—Fanshawe, as I am the citizenship and immigration critic, to debate Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. This bill was originally introduced in February 2014, as Bill 161, by the previous Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, the Honourable Mike Coteau.

When we're looking at immigration to Ontario, we know that Ontario has been falling behind when it comes to the number of immigrants who arrive in Ontario. From 2001 to 2011, the proportion of immigrants to Ontario declined by almost a third, from a 59.3% peak in 2001 to 40% in 2011. These numbers are the lowest share Ontario has seen in 30 years. So there is a problem, Speaker, when it comes to attracting newcomers to Ontario. It is estimated that Ontario will face a shortage of 364,000 skilled workers by the year 2025.

Statistics Canada indicates that among the Canadian population in 2011, three large generations can be identified using demographic criteria: the baby boomer generation, the parents of baby boomers and the children of baby boomers. In the coming years, many of the baby boomers will reach the age of 65, accelerating the popu-

lation of seniors past working age in Canada. By 2031, all baby boomers will have reached 65, and the proportion of seniors could reach 23%." That comes from Statistics Canada.

We have a skills shortage when it comes to specific skills in Ontario. Immigration is a component and a crucial part of our economy and educational future so that we can respond to labour market needs and remain competitive.

Immigration will make Ontario a better place to live. Immigration would need to be more than 2.5 times greater than it is today to offset the decline in Ontario's labour force being caused by the aging population.

In 2012, an expert round table released a report called *Expanding Our Routes to Success*. It included 32 recommendations. This minister, at the time, announced the launch of *A New Direction: Ontario's Immigration Strategy*. This report set out the following targets. I'll read some of them. One of them was: "Request a doubling of our provincial nominee program limit to 2,000 in 2013, increasing to 5,000 in 2014." This bill is part of that recommendation. It is looking for the federal government to allow us to increase immigrants coming to Ontario—newcomers coming to Ontario—to 5,000.

It also recommends:

"Achieve employment rates and income levels for immigrants that are in line with those of other Ontarians.

"Maximize the potential and the use of temporary foreign workers and international students.

"Improve job prospects of non-economic immigrants.

"Provide more resources for employers to recruit and welcome immigrant employees."

That's very important, Speaker, because when we're inviting, when we're trying to sell Ontario, we have to make sure that people who come here have job prospects, and the employers should communicate to this government what their needs are in the job market so we can fill them; we can fill them with people who already work here and we can also fill them with newcomers looking for new opportunities.

It also says we should:

"Encourage employers to develop or expand mentorship, internship and on-the-job training programs.

"Achieve 5% francophone immigration."

That is very important as well.

"Increase employment rates of immigrants in fields that match their experience." We have a lot of concerns with respect to that. We know a lot of professional newcomers come to this country with credentials that are quite high-level skilled, but they have trouble finding

work. We've heard from newcomers and immigrants who are here that the trouble is that their credentials aren't recognized; therefore, that sets barriers in their field for them being employed in what they were trained to do.

They also recommended that we should: "Work toward a decrease in the unemployment rate of recent immigrants so that it is in line with that of other Ontarians." That speaks to the fact that when we have newcomers come to Ontario, we don't have programs to fill those job gaps; therefore, they end up being unemployed.

Having someone come to this country, and they're looking for new opportunities, they're looking to work hard and have their family come here or have a family and start their life here—no one wants to do that without an employment opportunity, an employment prospect. You can't survive without having that employment prospect.

Another recommendation is: "Increase the number of immigrants licensed in their professions." Again, could we do that? We could look at having that retraining, having those credentials upgraded if they need to be, so that professionals—like doctors, like engineers—can actually come here and work. There are many, many professionals who aren't living up to their full potential with their educational background when they arrive in Ontario.

0910

This is an interesting one: "Create a ... forum to drive a 'no wrong door' approach to accessing immigrant services." We hear many times that, when immigrants or newcomers come to Canada, they have limitations on services they can access. You know, we open our doors for them to come here and work here. They should be deserving enough to use our services—our educational services and our health services.

"Commit to annual reports on progress and achievement." That's something where I think this government is lacking in doing that. Setting targets is great, but once you set those targets we need those reports to confirm that work has been done, that you've reached those targets and been successful. That's something I'll speak to later; in the Auditor General's report they actually also recommend that this government should be tracking and reporting the success of this program.

Another thing they suggest—this is kind of common sense; I'm not sure why it hasn't been done already—is, "Establish a minister's table with employers to consult businesses on immigration matters." Maybe that has been done already, but I find it highly strange that, if it's a recommendation in the expert round table, they actually had to include that recommendation for the government to consult with businesses on immigration matters—what their needs are, what the deficiencies are, where they need help and what can be improved.

I hope as well that, as these programs are being developed, as the provincial nominee program is implemented and as this act goes through the House, hopefully gets passed and goes into legislation, we also will consult with the people we want to come here—the newcomers,

the immigrants—on what their barriers are, because we need a full picture. When we're going to address the outcome, the performance of a program, we need—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There are about six sidebars going on, and I'm having trouble even hearing the speaker, so I'd appreciate, if you have any major discussions, you taking them outside. Thank you.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The participants in these programs need to be consulted and need to give feedback. They need to give success stories and need to give stories of not being successful in order for this government to get it right. Right now, the government is only reintroducing this bill—it's number 49—and it's designed to increase the class of economic immigrants. They want to promote immigrants, newcomers coming here, to work in Ontario.

In February 2014, there had been some debate on the bill in the House—at that time it was Bill 161—by then NDP MPP and immigration critic Michael Prue. At the time he did the lead on the bill, he remarked that he had been seeking immigration reform in the province for more than a decade, and he supported many of the ideas behind this bill. I can speak on behalf of myself and our caucus: We do agree with the premise of this bill and the intent of the bill, so we would like to see it move forward and be debated and given some feedback in this House. Then, when it gets to committee, hopefully some of the real work can be done to make these changes on this bill a positive thing for newcomers when they get here.

This bill is a step in the right direction, but, like Mr. Prue, I have concerns that this bill isn't as strong as it could be. Michael called the bill, then 161, timid, because it only gave the minister the ability to set regulations for how to act, and did not actually prescribe how to act by laying out a clear framework. That's always important. If you're going to have the captain of the ship drive that ship, he needs to have the power to create policy and a framework of the course of that ship. The lack of substance persists with Bill 49. When you read through the sections of the bill, there is a lot of "the minister may" in this piece of legislation. Therein lies the rub, Speaker.

New Democrats have been very clear that we support a made-in-Ontario solution for immigrants. Ontario will be following behind a number of other provinces like Manitoba, British Columbia and Quebec, some of which have had detailed immigration laws on the books for a long time. Of course, this legislation was very much prodded by changes that the federal government would like to see, which I'll return to later.

New Democrats agree that, in order for this province to grow and assume our rightful place, we need to encourage more economic immigration to this province, but as of right now this is really only a piece of economic legislation. New Democrats are glad to see at least that in the preamble to this bill.

The preamble reads: "The government of Ontario is committed to implementing a vision of immigration to the province that recognizes not only the important role

that immigrants play in growing the economy across Ontario but also the importance of family and humanitarian commitments.” But as my colleague for Windsor–Tecumseh pointed out when he spoke on the introduction of this bill, if this government finally wants to bring Ontario into line with other jurisdictions in this country, like Manitoba, British Columbia and Quebec, that if Ontario wants more control over immigration, then with that greater control, that greater power, comes greater responsibility.

Since under this bill the minister will have new powers to set the course of immigration in this province, this could mean getting out of the detention business, for instance. We’ll see if that’s actually the case: if the government’s intent is really to do that and get out of the detention business when it comes to immigration.

It could mean ensuring that any individual within Ontario can gain access to services they need to ensure they are productive and safe, regardless of status. Where better than within legislation governing immigration in this province? That’s what New Democrats mean by greater responsibility.

I should point out that I’m glad this government saw fit last year to end the long practice of co-operating with the federal enforcement of immigration warrants through traffic stops. This practice exclusively profiled individuals working in vehicles, and I’m glad that New Democrats could help bring this issue to light.

I think it was in 2000 and—gosh, it’s been a while. I can’t remember exactly. What had happened was that it came to light that the provincial government, the MTO, was working with the Canada Border Services Agency and they were doing traffic stops and vehicle inspections. They were pulling over drivers in vehicles just because they were ethnic; they were diverse in nature. They were not checking their vehicle, per se, but their status, and many of them were deported. When we brought this to the minister for the MTO, the Honourable Mr. Del Duca, he looked into it, so I have to give him credit for that, and he did respond by saying that that practice would not continue any further.

Good immigration policy means making sure that new immigrants and their families can settle here and that the services and resources they need to integrate and succeed, such as access to affordable housing, are explicitly factored into the legislation.

I was given this card by an advocate for newcomers to Canada. Decent housing is not just for people who live here. Decent housing is for people we want to come here as well. If we’re asking newcomers to come to Canada, immigrants to come and work here and live here, let’s provide them with decent housing so that they can find those supports that they need and thrive.

Good immigration policy means making sure that new immigrants and families can live here, as I said. I also recognize that Bill 49 leaves open the possibility of funding for the settlement of NGOs, and that’s a good thing. But after 10 years of Liberal governments without an immigration policy, we need some detail and we need

some meat on the bones. Putting into the bill that they’re going to be funding NGOs for settlement services is great, but we need those details and we need that information.

Yes, Speaker, I would want to see some changes, some toughening up of the loopholes as they are currently existing that would have the potential to exempt some of the biggest recruitment and immigrant employment agencies that operate in the federal system from potentially having to register. As bigger employers they don’t necessarily have to register, and we need to toughen that up when we’re looking at having people come over here for economic opportunities.

In fact, there are laws on the books already that can protect against recruiters for foreign workers charging unfair recruitment fees—the 2009 Ontario Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act—but that same study found it lacks enforcement. That’s key: the enforcement and what that will look like. So it’s good that the study was there, Speaker, but, like we said, that study lacks enforcement.

0920

What’s to stop the worst offenders among immigration consultants who take fees from temporary farm workers and new arrivals from operating in Ontario? What are we doing to curb that—a proactive approach, actively engaged in doing that? In this bill, there’s not too much teeth to it. Again, it’s a lot of maze and regulations that we don’t know what it actually will take the form of. Right now in this legislation it’s not clear anything will. It’s not clear if some of the bigger recruitment agencies that operate federally will have to register, as it is now in this bill. I’d like to hear more detail from the minister on how these consultants will be made to opt into registering, and what will prevent them from operating if they don’t.

As with anything, there are some very hard-working consultants, but there has also been a lot of opportunism with consultants who have taken advantage of people who seek safety and opportunity here in this great province.

I’m glad that there are provisions for compliance and enforcement regimes in the bill, including inspection and investigation powers, offences and penalties for both individuals and organizations seen to abuse those simply looking to make a better life for themselves. But much of this, as written, is discretionary and left up to “the director”—again, not some real clear authority for the director to do this. We’d like to see specifics. I’d like to hear from the minister what that would look like in practice.

The reality is that there are many questions left about this bill, and concerns about it from those who represent, particularly, migrant or temporary foreign workers and other non-economic class immigrants to this province.

I have heard from migrant worker advocates that this bill hints at all the things we want but does them badly. Unless the loopholes around the registry of employment placement agencies are closed, little will change for the 90,000-plus foreign workers to Ontario, who can’t expect to be fast-tracked into permanent residency under the

federal legislation. The federal government's immigration policies will now make it harder, and it will take longer for most landed immigrants to become permanent residents.

The federal government's immigration policies are making it harder, and the federal government has been explicit that they mean to invite or recruit wealthy investors to immigrate. We need to make sure we have those laws or those requirements that they must register. But that isn't the majority of people who migrate to Canada, or Ontario. The people who do immigrate here expect to work very hard, and do work very hard indeed, to make life better for themselves and their families. We have a responsibility to them, as a province. The fact is that we need them here and many of them go out west.

This is an economic bill, a labour bill, and so New Democrats would like to see a requirement that there be coordination between the Ministries of Labour and Immigration. Really, we are promoting economic opportunities for newcomers, but where are the labour laws to support that? It's currently not in this bill. So why now? In fact, the federal government has signalled that they need the provinces to take more of a hand in setting economic immigration goals. This bill, in order to be able to do that, still needs the federal buy-in. Right now, the split between economic immigration and family settlement, which includes refugees, is essentially 50-50. I know this government would like the numbers of skilled economic immigration to go up as much as 75%.

As I mentioned earlier, New Democrats understand the need to bring along skilled economic newcomers. We have long supported recognizing foreign qualifications so that when someone migrates here looking for a better future and to offer the skills they already have, they will be able to. We talked about skilled worker shortages and then making it incredibly difficult for individuals who have these skills to use them once they immigrate here. If someone is a trained health professional they should be able to work in health care. If someone is an engineer or has an economic degree, or any number of other professions, they should be able to work in those professions.

I recently met a man in London who wrote to me and told me his story. I'd like to read that. This is what he wrote. He is an internationally trained professional in civil engineering, water resources. With more than 10 years' experience, he came to Canada in February 2011. He says:

"My goal is to find an employment relative to my field of study. Obtaining an engineering licence; i.e. a PEng, is one of the major steps for this type of employment. During the last four years, I tried my best to complete this step by evaluation of my credentials, passing professional practice exam (ethics and law—PPE) and approving my international experience. Having done this, the Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO) has issued me a provisional licence which is only valid if I work under the supervision of a PEng.

"To get my regular engineering licence, I need to have a minimum of one year of Canadian engineering experi-

ence. It looks like not many employers are ready to offer the position without a licence, even if the person is ready to volunteer to get this experience. Public service employers also have only very limited positions for this purpose during the year. In other words, it is less likely many candidates like me can get these positions.

"I am sending you this email to let you know about the importance of the issue and hoping you (as our respected MPP) can address the problem in the higher level of the government to find a proper and immediate solution." This bill does not address the challenges facing newcomers who are highly trained immigrants to acquire the accreditation and/or the job experience they require in the field.

Speaker, as you can see, that is a true life story. I met this gentleman at an event in London. We were chatting, and I said, "Send me an email; put your thoughts in writing." I'm glad I had this opportunity to bring his perspective forward, because he's not the only one. We've all heard the stories of when you get in that taxicab and they talk a little bit about themselves, and you exchange a personal anecdote and they talk about how hard it is for their credentials to be recognized in Ontario. Some of them, I've heard they're promised that they're going to get a job—and that could be through those recruiters or those consultant agencies that promise a great life here—and once they get here their hopes and dreams are let down.

Another barrier I have heard about from constituents is about newcomers obtaining ID. That's becoming increasingly more difficult for them to do. We agree that people, of course, need ID in order to enjoy the full rights and services that ensure their well-being and to be able to contribute and participate. But if you don't have ID, that's a barrier to inclusion that should be addressed in the immigration bill. Currently, it's not.

Again, another example: A constituent of mine lost her record of landing. Service Canada will not provide a replacement of this document once it's lost; when it's gone, it's gone. The original—there's no way to replace it through Service Canada. What they will do is issue a verification status document which has all the same information, but Service Ontario doesn't accept the verification status document. That just seems like it's two governments not communicating. So you lose your record of landing—and sometimes people come over in a state, maybe they're leaving their country for reasons of conflict, and they may not have everything organized, or they've moved from one place to the next—that can happen to all of us, where we misplace documents. Service Canada is willing to give them verification status, but Service Ontario won't accept it.

This constituent in particular is a refugee, and she doesn't have a passport. She can't get her permanent resident card without some form of primary identification like an Ontario photo ID card. So we can see the Catch-22 here that people find themselves in, Speaker, and I don't see anything in this legislation that would actually facilitate making that a smoother process, a smoother transition.

0930

Two government ministries, on different levels—this is part of my recommendation—need to sit down at the table and figure out what documentation is acceptable if they're concerned about fraud on documents. They need to find systems within the system to help people. Bringing refugees here who can't access ID to have services just doesn't seem humane. It really doesn't.

Talking about examples brings me to a case that was recently here in Queen's Park. They went to the media studio with respect to a live-in caregiver. It was the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. They came to the media studio to tell her story. Her name was Marites Angana. She started work as a live-in caregiver in Toronto in August 2014, not too long ago, and she died of a brain hemorrhage from a fall while at work in December of last year, so she was here about four months.

Domestic workers, many of whom are current or former live-in caregivers, are excluded from the Occupational Health and Safety Act, which provides health and safety protections to Ontario workers and triggers a Ministry of Labour investigation in the case of serious injury or death in the workplace. A Ministry of Labour investigation would uncover the causes of Marites's death to better prevent future workplace accidents.

On November 30, 2014, the federal government of Canada placed a cap on the number of caregivers who can access permanent residence each year and made the live-in requirement optional. However, caregivers' workplaces will continue to be their employers' homes, including those who remain domestic workers after receiving permanent residency status.

It wasn't widespread, but it was covered in the *Toronto Sun's* files, and I'll read from that article:

"The death of a caregiver in her employer's home has prompted calls for greater labour law and workplace insurance protection for domestic workers.

"Supporters of Marites Angana are trying to raise \$10,000 to send her body back to her 13-year-old son and parents in the Philippines.

"Liza Draman, of the Caregivers Action Centre, said Marites died of a brain hemorrhage on December 2 in a Toronto hospital, a few days after falling in her employer's garage.

"As family and friends of Marites Angana we cannot rest until we know what caused her death and prevent such tragedies from taking place again," Draman said Friday.

"The Ministry of Labour must broaden its investigations to include the deaths of any domestic workers on the job as it would regular workplace accidents, she said.

"Ernie Puguon, of the Ifugao Association of Canada, said Angana came from one of the poorest regions of the Philippines, and was the primary breadwinner for her family.

"Her father is a rice field worker, her mother is a housewife," said Puguon. "She has a 13-year-old son in

grade 7, and is supporting the studies of her 19-year-old sister who is still in college."

"Angana arrived in Canada only four months ago, brought by a recruitment agency to which she paid thousands of dollars, Puguon said.

"The association is appealing for financial help through the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office for the funds to provide a funeral and send her remains home to the Philippines, he said....

"A WSIB official contacted Puguon a few minutes prior to a media conference Friday to tell him that the case is being assessed to determine if Angana was entitled to any benefits."

It goes on a little bit more, but it just goes to show. This lady, Marites, was a working mom. She came to Ontario to try to support herself and her family, and had a tragedy happen. The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change is calling for some fairness under the Ontario Health and Safety Act. They're workers here in Ontario. We bring them here, but they're not good enough to be protected under that act. We have to look at that, Speaker. This government has to address those issues and concerns.

Speaker, these are some examples of various issues facing immigrants in Ontario. This government needs to do better on these issues so immigrants have the opportunity to succeed as well as provide health and safety protections to all who work in this province.

This bill is a very small start but I would like to see some changes. The changes that I would like to see, Speaker, are some of those recommendations that came from the expert study in 2012. When it goes to committee, I would love to hear the deputants' feedback on how to make this bill stronger and successful. If we want to increase the number of economic prospects coming to Ontario through newcomers, we need to make sure it's a positive experience and that when they're here, they're going to continue that economic prosperity.

I also wanted to talk about the Auditor General's report, because the Auditor General's report came after the bill was tabled, so I'm not sure if the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration actually took some of these suggestions and put them in the bill. When I read the bill over, it didn't appear to me that some of these things looked like they were going to be implemented as process. I'd like to read some of them to you.

Again, the Auditor General reinforces this: "As Ontario's population ages, the need for the province to attract skilled immigrants is likely to increase. A number of recent reports highlight that there is a shortage of skilled labour in Ontario. For instance, a report published by the Jobs and Prosperity Council in December 2012 noted that, despite Canada's strong education system and skilled population, there are still a number of sectors that report challenges recruiting workers with specific skill sets, especially in the skilled trades."

So there have been expert reports about this. It's nothing new. We need to retrain our workers here and we

need to bring in newcomers to fill these positions or we're going to be falling behind globally.

"The Ontario provincial nominee program is becoming more attractive to foreign nationals because, in February 2014, the federal government terminated both the Immigrant Investor Program for passive investors (that is, investors not actively involved in or managing the business), and the Immigrant Entrepreneur Program for experienced businesspeople from other countries who want to own and actively manage businesses in Canada."

By doing that, Speaker, this bill is, I think, a response to those two things that the federal government has done.

This is what the auditor has said: "During the course of our audit, we received a number of allegations about the program's operation and the risk that it was continuing to consider applications from individuals and organizations who were suspected to have been involved with immigration fraud and/or illegal immigration-linked investment schemes." That's where we need to tighten up this regulation piece: where we have the recruiters and the employers registered and licensed so that they're both responsible; they're both legally liable for what they do.

"In writing this report, we have included recommendations that address not only the issues raised during our value-for-money audit, but also those identified in the allegations. As well, the ministry, after recommendations from our office, formally referred certain case information to law enforcement in September 2014." Good on the auditor to find those holes and bring that to light.

It also says, "It also needs to track and measure how well people nominated in the past have in fact contributed to Ontario's economic development." It needs to do that. It needs to have that tracking process, setting targets and aspirations. If, at the end of those aspirations and targets, you don't see those results, then it's all for naught, all these plans that we make.

They said, "We also found that the ministry did not share program integrity concerns with both internal staff and external parties (law enforcement and regulators) who needed to know and could act on them accordingly. Furthermore, we found that program staff had not been provided with clear guidelines on how to deal with potentially fraudulent situations, and the program had not established anti-fraud mechanisms." So within their own ministry, Speaker, they need mechanisms and procedures to prevent that kind of fraud that takes advantage of newcomers and immigrants coming to our country. They need to do better in their own ministry.

0940

Here's another one: "Many program staff are temporary, and have received no written guidance or job training; turnover is high." If we're going to take this kind of initiative seriously and ask for higher newcomers and immigrants with economic opportunities to come to this province, we need to have properly trained staff who are going to review those applications and the program that's been set up.

Here's another one that the auditor says that they found here in their report: "The ministry used incomplete

information to assess program outcomes." You set up the program, you set up the act, but you're using incomplete information to assess the outcomes. We can't track something and know if it's working effectively if we don't have the outcomes assessed with the right tools.

Some of these revelations in this report I find kind of surprising; really, I do. This government and this ministry need to take this particular citizenship and immigration piece in Ontario seriously.

"The economic impact of nominating individuals without a job offer has not been assessed." That's the other piece, Speaker. Having a job offer is a stronger predictor of economic success than not having a job offer; that's pretty common sense. If you come to Canada and you don't have a job offer, you don't have a prospect of getting a job, you're not going to succeed. We all know that.

Then they talk about the impact of the current program design: "Majority of nominees selected had a post-graduate degree and no job offer, and their economic impact was not assessed"—again, failure after failure to follow through on what is happening with these newcomers once they come here, highly educated with credentials, high-skilled workers, yet there is no assessment of what the outcome is.

"In 2013, two thirds of nominees did not have a job offer. This appears contrary to the intent of the program, which is to select individuals who are likely to be an economic benefit to the province. The nominees without a job offer were primarily individuals with a master's or PhD degree from an Ontario university." That's shocking, too. And we know this. We know this because post-secondary students, when they graduate, are saying they're having a hard time finding work. We encourage international students to come to Ontario, but if we don't have those job prospects for them—it seems like a dismal future for anyone coming out of post-secondary education after spending years of study and financing their education and not being able to practise what they've learned.

I know that our member from London West yesterday reintroduced the work-integrated learning bill, which helps students who are graduating or need to graduate find internships. I hope that when this bill comes up for debate, this government will see fit to pass it on to committee, because the member from London West in her previous life was a researcher and she's very passionate about this bill that she introduced. Part of the bill she has put in there is the work-integrated learning piece. She introduced it last session and she reintroduced it yesterday. It's very important that when we have these educated international students in the province and they've got PhDs and master's degrees—where's the employment and where are the assessment tools to find out what the outcomes are, what happens after they get here and they can't find work? We should be tracking. Do they leave the province? Do they go back to their home country? What are they doing when that happens to them?

“The ministry has not adequately monitored whether nominees without job offers admitted to Ontario are eventually employed.” That’s what I’m saying now. Nobody monitors it. “Doing so could demonstrate whether nominating people who do not have job offers but have post-graduate degrees results in positive economic outcomes. The ministry had administered surveys in 2010 and 2013 to measure outcomes, but the surveys did not cover a large enough sample from this program component (less than 5% of all nominees without job offers responded to the survey).”

They did try, but the response was kind of abysmal.

Speaker, the other piece: “In 2010, cabinet instructed the ministry to introduce the master’s stream only after an evaluation was completed on the PhD stream. However, the master’s stream was introduced just two months after the PhD stream without an evaluation of the latter. The ministry stated that introducing the master’s stream was a ministerial direction, but could not produce any formal authorization.”

We are not doing that great of a job in this ministry providing economic opportunities when we’re looking for newcomers coming here. We need to support employers who identify work gaps in our communities. I know Fanshawe College works very closely with the local business community to try to meet the demands of where employers are saying they’re going with their businesses and what skills they need workers trained in. That’s part of this whole picture when we have newcomers come to Canada: making sure that the economic opportunities that we say are here in Ontario actually come to realization for people.

In London we have a high employment rate, and it’s been steady for quite a long time. If we don’t do something about the need that employers are looking for when they say, “I need a specific skilled worker for this job”—we need to tie that in with our education system, our post-secondary education system. We need to tie that in with the immigration newcomers coming to Ontario. What is our workforce going to look like? We’re going to be losing potential employers in Ontario if they can’t meet the needs of the people they need to do the work for them.

High-tech jobs: That’s something I’ve heard over and over again. That’s a new part of a sector that’s happening in employment. Manufacturing is still there—we still need our manufacturing—but tech jobs are the up-and-coming new industry that we’re finding is happening.

There is a website that has some pilot funding that started in London. It’s called WorkTrends. They’re doing wonderful work with employers. They’re actually identifying where employers are looking for job positions. You can go to their website and it will tell you what the job market is like. What they’re trying to do is help people who are looking for a career in the future, to try to give them some insight as to what’s coming in the future.

There’s a lot of good work and agencies that are trying to bring the workforce up to a standard where we can match skilled workers with the job market that’s avail-

able, but this government also needs to participate when it comes to the newcomers and the immigration piece. Inviting people to come here on the premise that they’re going to have a job, and then we see in the Auditor General’s report that’s one of the things that is a problem, and then, again, it’s not assessed, it’s not monitored and it’s not reported on—there is no success to your program if you can’t show me the evidence. Show me the numbers. Show us the numbers. Show us the success rate.

When it goes to committee, I hope there are going to be some real changes. I know the government has a Liberal majority on committee, but they need to stop being so narrow-minded and selective when they hear these deputants. You need to open up your ideas. Be innovators.

0950

You want employers to innovate. You want employers to produce. You want them to research. They provide you a lot of that information already. In London, there’s lots of research going on—that WorkTrends I was just talking about.

When people come to committee, don’t be so rigid. Open up your mind to ideas that come forward. We hear that a lot. Young people’s voices want to be heard in many new ideas across this province. They want to have some evolution to how things are done.

For example, my son said, “Mom, we’ve got to change this suit-and-tie way of doing business. People can work from home.” He loves working on the cloud and Skype. He talks about having meetings on Skype. He gave me a strange suggestion—maybe it’s my generation, but perhaps for his generation, things will change—and he’s putting the idea out there. He said, “Mom, why do you have to go to Toronto and sit in the Legislature four days a week? Why don’t you guys have electronic meetings? You can do the same business here in this house and you can be on the cloud or Skype.” I said, “Oh, really? I never thought of that.” He said, “Think of the money it would save.”

The new generation that’s coming up are high-tech; they’re all on those electronic devices. They’re all about ways of doing things differently. I’m not suggesting that we all be on the computer and we all sign in to Skype for a meeting. We were just having a chat, and he was thinking outside of the box. When young people talk about certain things, we have to think outside of the box.

Another idea he was telling me about—because he’s surfing the Net and doing a lot of research: He said, “Mom, if you’re travelling, you can actually go on a website and you can find people who will take you into their home for a night. It’s way less expensive.” I saw some problems with that. You don’t know whose home you’re going into.

But again, these are things that are out there that some of the younger generation are accepting as new ways of doing business. They’re not stuck in the box, in the lines. They want to go outside the lines and think of new ways of how to get creative.

Speaker, I want to encourage the minister and the people who work for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to read this Auditor General's report. There are a lot of procedural suggestions in here that are extremely important for the success of the program that the Ontario Immigration Act has set forward. If they don't tighten up what they're doing in there, people are going to fall through the cracks. The results of these immigrants coming here and what their experiences are—we won't know what that will look like because the reports won't be done.

One other piece of information in the auditor's report said that there was never a procedural manual in seven years—if I could find it later, if anyone has a question, I can certainly look at it in detail—for people who work in the ministry. How do you expect people to do their job without some kind of guidelines or direction? That needs to be tightened up if this is going to be something we're going to take seriously in Ontario. It's long overdue, as the previous member from Beaches–East York, Michael Prue, pointed out. It's a long time coming that we've been waiting for legislation on immigration. If this is what the government is proposing, then let's get it right from the ministry perspective.

Let's get it right when we go to committee and we hear deputants. Let's not dismiss ideas that come forward right away, just because they don't fit in our little box. It doesn't mean you have to accept the whole premise of it, but you could take some things from it.

I was reading in the London Free Press this morning that a lot of schools are being closed in London, as they are throughout Ontario. What happened is, the city had purchased a particular school and now they're going to develop it into housing and some park area. They're going to repurpose that school. It's just not going to sit there abandoned. It was in the paper how this was a great, new idea of how to move with the times. The way things change, we have to change the way we do things as well. As a government, as a business and as families, we all have to go with that pace sometimes. Things are going to change.

I remember when we had bank machines and my dad refused to use a bank machine. Seniors had a really difficult time accepting that they would go and push these buttons and get money out of a machine. It was like, "Wow, this is just so forward-thinking and futuristic. Wow, look at this technology. We can get money out of a machine. You don't have to talk to the teller." My father refused to use it, and not that it's a bad thing. That's what he wanted to do. He still had the passbook. He'd go in all the time and get it updated.

But sometimes ideas limit us because it's a generational block. We, as leaders, have to think beyond those blocks, beyond our generation. Just because it's comfortable for us doesn't mean things shouldn't change. We need to get out of our comfort zone in many things when it comes to how we're growing Ontario. We've talked about that here, job prospects, the job ideas that we mentioned, and one of them is a good idea. It's attaching

funding, it's attaching government money to job creation. It's attaching government funding to resources produced in Ontario in processing plants, instead of just giving the money away. That's seen results. That's connected to actual evidence of success.

Speaker, I want to thank the members today for being here and listening to my contributions to Bill 49. I look forward to listening to more debate and for this to go to committee so that we can actually do the work.

I'm sure all members have had an opportunity to sit on committee. It's actually very fascinating to listen to the deputants. A lot of them are very passionate. They come up with very interesting perspectives from their backgrounds and what they do as advocates. It really opens your eyes to what's happening not just in these four walls but in your own constituency when you hear them—and then other cities around Ontario, and encouraging members to move out of their ridings when there's a committee and hear other constituents' concerns up north.

If you've never been up north, take the opportunity to do that. Go in the wintertime so you can experience the road conditions.

Mr. John Vanthof: Bring a coat.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Bring a snowsuit, a Ski-doo suit that you only see—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: And a shovel.

Interjection: And a snow shovel.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, and a shovel. Then you can have an appreciation. I had that appreciation. I went up to Sudbury last year. I was at Sault Ste. Marie as well. You have an appreciation when you hear members from the north talking about road conditions. Out in southwestern Ontario, we get all in a fluster when we can't get out of our driveways because the snow hasn't been plowed, and that's rightfully so. But imagine being up north and having those severe road conditions impeding you from getting out of your house. You might be a senior and you may have a medical appointment that's necessary.

Get out there, go to different ridings and get to understand the lay of the land and go when it's not the best time of year. Go when it's not a good time of year. Challenge yourself. Get out of your comfort zone. Put yourself in the place of people who have to pay those heating bills when it's so cold up north, those exorbitant hydro rates, and then maybe you can understand some of their plights.

That's what we're here for. We're supposed to listen and we're supposed to take action, but if we can't identify with some of those concerns—sometimes we can't really effectively understand those things that people come to committee and bring concerns. So going to those places up northeast—Timiskaming–Cochrane—John, what's the population of your riding?

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Mr. John Vanthof: Sixty thousand.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Sixty thousand? We should all go to John's riding and hear what farmers have to say.

Mr. John Vanthof: Seven hours, then five hours.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: There you go. That's a long drive, and we take it for granted.

We really need to make sure that we keep our minds open to what we're doing here, because if we start just looking at our four walls, in our box, we are not going to grow; we are not going to contribute positively to leadership. Challenge yourself. Get out of your comfort zone every day as a leader, so that you can keep your mind fresh and have perspectives that aren't the same old perspectives when it comes to looking at ideas for helping newcomers and immigrants in Canada fulfill what the act is promising.

I just want to say thank you, Speaker, for that opportunity, and I look forward to hearing what members' contributions are.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I'd like to thank the member opposite from London–Fanshawe for her comments. I'm glad to see that the NDP want to see this bill go forward and that they too agree that we need to control and support immigration in this great province of ours.

I'm proud that Ontario is the second province, after Quebec, to introduce its own immigration legislation. Our proposed legislation is a beginning, not an end. The Ontario Immigration Act will formally recognize the long history of immigration to Ontario and the important nation-building role it has played in forming Ontario's social, economic and cultural values. With this legislation, we are taking steps towards charting our own course when it comes to attracting more skilled immigrants to drive our economy and keep Ontario strong.

Equally important, the act will contribute to good governance by making sure that authority for Ontario's selection programs is clear and transparent. If passed, the act will strengthen our ongoing efforts to deter fraud and detect misrepresentation. The Ontario Immigration Act will increase transparency and information-sharing with our immigration partners. The act will allow Ontario to work more closely with the federal government on recruitment, selection and admission of skilled immigrants.

Everyone has a different recipe for economic success in Ontario. Immigration is a staple ingredient, along with great public education, skills training, infrastructure renewal and supporting a dynamic business climate.

In this way, our Ontario Immigration Act is part of the government's plan to invest in people and support the sectors that boost the economy and create jobs for all Ontarians. This bill is very important to Ontario's newcomers, just as it is for its employers. As such, Bill 49 is vitally important to Ontario. I look forward to further debate on this very important bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's always a pleasure to listen to the member from London–Fanshawe. She points out

some of the issues with the Ontario Immigration Act, Bill 49. We are supporting it. We need some changes in it.

I think the biggest attractor to Ontario—our province used to always lead this country in immigration because it was a place where you'd come to get a job. Now we're not seeing that. Actually, we see the other provinces pulling ahead in their quest for skilled trades and skilled immigrants. It's unfortunate because if we want to get back up to number one, we're going to have to do something to get our economy going, and we're not seeing that. Over the last 10 years, our economy has shrunk in relation to the rest of North America.

But there's no secret to what's happening here: It's the cost of doing business. It's so high in this province that we're chasing our employers away. Places like Michigan and New York state—their best economic development officers are actually up here in Canada. They work right in this building, on the other side of this House, as they raise all the payroll taxes that we talk about. Now they're considering another carbon tax, and we're seeing the exodus of business increasing at a rate that's hard to believe.

We have to get back to being a place where employers can feel confident that there's a future for them, confident so that they can actually invest in Ontario, invest in their employees and get a return. If we get to that point, we'll likely see ourselves come back up in our ability to attract good, qualified immigrants that really are the backbone of this province.

We look forward to making some changes. The federal government has forced the hand of the province to do something, so this is their response. I'm looking forward to more debate.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to stand and compliment the member from London–Fanshawe on her comprehensive report on this bill.

Our province was built on immigration. I know in my community of Windsor—I believe we're the fourth most diverse community in Canada. A lot of our growth is from people who immigrate to Ontario. We have the Carrousel of the Nations, a wonderful festival. The multicultural council is very, very active in our community.

Let me say, to our Chinese Canadians: Gong Hay Fat Choy; Happy Chinese New Year.

To the member from Davenport, who I believe is either the daughter or granddaughter of immigrants—and I believe she speaks four or five languages. This is how our communities get enriched, how we grow, how the fabric of our culture is enhanced: through immigration.

The member from London–Fanshawe talked about problems with an immigrant having photo ID. I just went through that with my mother, who turned 91 in December. She still lives alone in Newfoundland and still drives. Her driver's licence expired before she left to come up here, and that is the only photo ID that she had. At the ticket counter, when I was flying her to Ottawa on her way back to Newfoundland, she said, "This has expired. You need photo ID." Well, when you're 91 years old,

you don't have a lot of photo ID. She did have her birth certificate, and she did have her social insurance number, so we got her on the plane.

But what is going to happen to a lot of our older people? We're changing the health cards, but a lot of them are still red and white, and they don't have a photo on them. If you don't have a passport, what do you have for photo ID?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this morning in support of Bill 49. I'm very pleased to hear my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh wish me and my colleagues and everyone celebrating lunar new year a happy new year. That's the right thing to do, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to this proposed bill, the Ontario Immigration Act strengthens the ongoing efforts to make sure highly skilled immigrants can work in their sector of expertise, especially in the health care sector. That's stated clearly in the bill, Mr. Speaker. The bill is called An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.

As a former registered nurse, I'm very pleased to see that, if passed, the legislation would amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, RHPA, so that regulations and requirements in relation to professions like nurses, doctors and dentists align with those in the Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act.

This act will also require transparency, objective—and decisions must be made in a timely manner. All of us in this Legislature have met somebody who has been trained overseas as a nurse, doctor or dentist but has not been qualified to work in the province of Ontario. If this legislation is passed, it will allow a more timely response from our regulatory body.

This measure is in line with our commitment to increase the number of immigrants licensed in their respective professions. One of the goals of the immigration strategy is to increase the number of skilled immigrants who are able to find work in their field and to increase the percentage of internationally trained professionals who are licensed in this province.

Mr. Speaker, just last night, I spent some time talking to former colleagues in Scarborough. They're telling us that this is a big problem, and we need to pass this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for London–Fanshawe has two minutes.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the members for Davenport, Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Windsor–Tecumseh—always a pleasure—and Scarborough–Agincourt. The way we went around the room here, the Legislature, people talked about how there are a lot of immigrants, and a lot of us have immigrant roots. Somehow, other than the aboriginal population, we've all come here as newcomers or immigrants. Many of us have built our lives successfully, worked hard. I'm second generation to Ontario. I know the member from Davenport

said that she came here as an immigrant too. So we know some of those struggles.

This bill is a step in the right direction by having people come here who are highly skilled, and health professionals, as the member from Scarborough–Agincourt pointed out. There are good steps in there that are moving us forward, but we need to make sure, as we make those steps, that we have the support services and the jobs that we're promising in those fields for those educated professionals and skilled workers—that they translate when they get here—and then tracking that, having some kind of system where you find out how that success translated for that newcomer. Because if you can see where it's working, then you know that you've accomplished what you set out to do. But that doesn't mean you can't improve it. Once something is working, you can't just sit back and say, "Yes, that's working great." There are always things that change, and that's what I was trying to say earlier: Bills are virtual. As things change, as time changes, we need to make sure that we're up on that so we can see things out to the finish line.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1011 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Laurie Scott: On behalf of Christine Elliott, the MPP for Whitby–Oshawa—the page captain today, Riley Eaton, is from her riding. I'd like to introduce her parents, Teresa and Chris Eaton, from Whitby. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my great delight to introduce my intern, who I'm about to lose in a week—my loss will be somebody across the aisle's gain: Kristen Neagle.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to introduce Setimo Eneriko, who is a Ryerson University student volunteering in my office on an exciting community project; and my legislative assistant Dave Bellmore. Welcome to the House.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I just want to add one addendum to what Laurie Scott mentioned about Riley Eaton's parents. Teresa Eaton was actually a page here in the 32nd Parliament, but I'm not asking how old she is.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome, and congratulations.

The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would like to welcome somebody to the Legislature who has been the mayor of Sioux Lookout, the mayor of Cochrane and the former chairman of Mushkegowuk Council, now the Grand Chief of Mushkegowuk Council: Lawrence Martin. Welcome.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'd like to introduce page Niko Hoogeveen's mother, Dr. Kelly Emerson Hoogeveen; grandmother Ann Hoogeveen; and grandfather Harry

Hoogeveen. They're in the members' gallery this morning.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I'd like to introduce two friends in the gallery today: Ahsan Irfan and Brian Thilagarajah.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It is with great pleasure today that I introduce my daughter, Monica Granados, who is sitting in the gallery today with me. C'est un plaisir.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I know we all find it challenging running our small businesses at our Queen's Park office and our constituency office. I want to welcome, on her first day at Queen's Park, my new assistant, Chana Weinstein. Thank you, Chana.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to welcome to the gallery today Mike Bloxam and Maggie Whalley from London, who are here with the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. Welcome.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to welcome here to the Legislature today the grades 4 and 5 students from Dovercourt Public School and their teachers, Mr. Fulton and Mr. Toale. Welcome.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to introduce, in the west members' gallery, members from the Canada youth delegation that I met with this morning: Anthony, Leah, Kathleen and Christian. Welcome to the Legislature.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I am becoming a woman of a certain age, but if my eyes are not mistaken, there is a woman from my community named Diane Dent here in the gallery.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I'd like to add to the introduction that the member for Timmins–James Bay gave of Grand Chief Lawrence Martin. Not only is he the Grand Chief of Mushkegowuk tribal council and the former mayor of the communities of Cochrane and Sioux Lookout—may I say the only person to ever be the mayor of two different communities—but also Grand Chief Martin is a Juno Award-winning musician from 1994 and has a new album out called Train of Life. Grand Chief Martin, please stand up. Go out and buy the album.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to introduce two guests from Laurier university who are here today, invited to participate and look at what's going on here at Queen's Park. They asked to come. We have both Aron and Eric who are here. Please take a bow.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to also welcome members from the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario. Welcome to the Legislature.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to welcome back former page Amber Bowes from Oshawa and her mother, Katherine Bowes. They are in the public gallery this morning.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm like the leader of the third party. If my eyes do not deceive me, one of my constituents, Susan Ratcliffe—I was thinking, what on earth is she doing in the gallery? Then the minister helpfully explained that she's with the Architectural Conservancy. Welcome.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): At this time I would like our pages to assemble to be introduced to the House, this new group of pages. They may have trouble setting the record if they're not quicker here.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Trickling in, like members coming in the House in the morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): They seem to be doing so with a little more vigour.

From Bramalea–Gore–Malton, Dhairya Bhatt; from Oshawa, Amber Bowes; from Halton, Vaughn Courage; from Northumberland–Quinte West, Julie Darling; from Whitby–Oshawa, Riley Eaton; from Barrie, Niko Hoogeveen; from Scarborough–Guildwood, Fardin Islam; from Eglinton–Lawrence, Arlyne James; from Scarborough–Agincourt, Andrew Liu; from London West, Munder Madlol; from Mississauga South, Natalie McLean; from York–Simcoe, Madison Mote; from Pickering–Scarborough East, Ali Rizvi; from Etobicoke North, Ishani Sharma; from Markham–Unionville, Victoria Soltau; from Simcoe North, Rachel Stong; from Kitchener Centre, William Stuart; from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Morgan Tamminga; from Mississauga–Streetsville, Hannah Tang; from Toronto Centre, Inaya Yousaf; from Oak Ridges–Markham, Eileen Zhang. These are our pages for this round. Thank you. Now get to work.

ORAL QUESTIONS

CURRICULUM

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question this morning is to the Premier. On November 18 in this House, you affirmed that your government had established a process to consult with parents on proposed changes to the Liberal sex education curriculum, but over the past three months I have heard from thousands of parents from across Ontario who have told me that no such consultation took place and that the period for consultation is now over.

Premier, why did you suggest to this House that you expected the chairs of each school council to consult with parents on the sex ed curriculum when this was, by the order of your Minister of Education, never going to happen?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just be clear: We were, and the Minister of Education was, very clear that all of the schools in the province, all 5,000 schools—the school council chairs—were being asked to take part in a consultation. That means that every region of the province, every school, every school council chair, had access to the consultation process. That is exactly what happened. We have completed that process.

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The fact is that the health and physical education curriculum is out of date. In fact, it's dangerously out of date, Mr. Speaker. Children in our society need the informa-

tion that is contained in an up-to-date health and physical education curriculum. They are going to get information somewhere. We want to make sure they get the right information and that they get information that is based on evidence.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: You clearly stated that “the role of a school council chair is to talk to the people in his or her school, to get that input and then to feed that input into a process.” Yet, Premier, the survey itself says, “to support the quality and integrity of the data collected from parent representatives, we strongly encourage parent representatives to complete the survey independently”; that is, Premier, without consulting parents.

Premier, when you stood here and said you expected school council chairs to conduct consultations, consultations the Liberal Party promised back in 2010, were you aware that your Minister of Education was working against a proper consultative process?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I think 5,000 parents who are informed parents, who are connected to their school communities—and I don’t know if the member opposite has ever been a school council chair. I have, and I know that when you’re a school council chair, you’re in touch with your community. You hear from your community. You know what your community is about and you have conversations with your community. Five thousand parents from around this province, from every region of this province, from every school had access to this process.

But I guess for me the real issue is that this health and physical education curriculum that is in place in Ontario right now dates back to 1998. We need to have this curriculum updated. We engaged in a consultation. We’re behind jurisdictions like British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and the update has to—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex will come to order.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Well, back to the Premier: Premier, I can only conclude that when you stood up in this House and defended this so-called process, you simply had no idea what the actual process was that your Minister of Education had established, perhaps, Premier, much in the same way that Dalton McGuinty had no idea about the new sex ed agenda his Minister of Education and her officials had planned back in 2010.

Enough of the secrecy, Premier. Enough of defending a process that doesn’t even exist. When are you going to start respecting the role of all parents in the education of their children?

Premier, when do you plan on releasing the proposed new curriculum to all Ontario parents so that the real consultation process can begin?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The curriculum will be posted on the Ministry of Education website for all to see within weeks. Later this winter it will be posted, Mr. Speaker, and it will be rolled out in classrooms in September 2015. The fact is that the curriculum we have in place in Ontario is out of date. We need to have it updated.

I’m not sure what the real agenda of the member opposite is. I’m not sure if the fear-mongering has more to do with his leadership campaign or whether it has to do with a very small group of people who want to stir up fear about the reality that kids need information. They need to understand how human beings relate to each other and they need to get that information based on science. That’s what the curriculum will do, and it will be available very shortly on the website.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My second set of questions is also for the Premier, regarding an ongoing criminal investigation into the conduct of her officials.

Premier, the Sudbury by-election was quickly called for mid-winter. You ignored what your own local party members had to say and appointed your candidate.

Premier, as you know, the OPP have noted their belief that the Liberals broke the law by attempting to lure a potential candidate with a government or political job. Premier, something stinks here. Ontario residents deserve to know what inducements were offered to keep Mr. Olivier out of the Sudbury by-election race.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly in this House and elsewhere, any suggestion that anything was offered in exchange for any action is simply false. The reality is that I had made a decision. I had made a decision to appoint a candidate, to appoint Glenn Thibeault as our candidate in Sudbury. He is going to be and is a wonderful MPP.

Having made that decision, there were conversations with the former candidate, the past candidate, to try to keep him involved in the party. That was the initiative, because I believe, as I have said, that it is important to keep people involved when they have taken part in an election, when they have been part of a party process. So we reached out to him to try to keep him involved. The fact is that the decision was made to appoint a candidate and the initiative was to keep him involved in the party.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Premier, you can continue to dance around this issue or you can use the time to come clean with the people of Ontario.

There can be no doubt that your deputy chief of staff went to Sudbury with the intent of influencing Mr. Olivier and inducing him not to join the race. In fact, the OPP have investigated and they’re of the belief that the

law was broken when a government or political job was offered.

Premier, what exactly did you or your staff or the Ontario Liberal Party offer to Mr. Olivier to step aside?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think this is an interesting issue and I think it is acknowledged that all parties do work to keep former candidates—

Mr. Steve Clark: Minister of whitewash.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. If I was absolutely sure of what somebody said, I would ask them to withdraw, but I'm not 100% sure. I think he gets my message.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'll withdraw.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think Ontarians actually expect more of their elected leaders than the politics of personal destruction. Both the opposition parties have appointed candidates in elections. Both the Tories and the NDP have sought to keep past candidates involved.

I guess I have a question back: If you think back to January 2009, the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock—and it might just be a coincidence, but on the very same day as she resigned her seat—

Mr. John Yakabuski: There was more to this than what you're saying. There were inducements offered.

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

Final supplementary.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: OPP investigator Detective Erin Thomas says: "I believe the words spoken by both Loughheed and Sorbara to Olivier assists me in my belief the Criminal Code offence has been committed." Premier, in fact, your government and your party are under three different OPP police investigations.

Premier, are you saying that you had, personally, no conversations with Ms. Sorbara or Mr. Loughheed about Andrew Olivier and the Sudbury by-election?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, as I was saying, on the very same day in January 2009, the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock resigned her seat so the new leader could win and was given a paid job the very same day.

The Sudbury Star, January 10, 2009, said:

"Scott Trades Seat for Head Office Job.

"Progressive Conservative Laurie Scott was given the job Friday of getting the opposition party ready for the next election in exchange for giving up her seat in the Ontario Legislature."

The Peterborough Examiner said: "In exchange for giving up her seat, Tory said Scott is taking on the 'enormous responsibility' of election readiness chairwoman for the party."

Speaker, the record speaks for itself.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. When we asked you yesterday about—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That was the wrong rotation.

The leader of the third party.

1050

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Premier. The Premier promised that she was going to clean up corruption and cover-ups after 10 years of Liberal scandal, when she came into office. She claimed that she was going to lead the most open and the most transparent government in Canada.

But the report from the gas plants committee shows that not a lot has changed. The gas plants scandal started with a cover-up, and the report is an attempt to cover up the cover-up.

Let's be honest: Covering up isn't the same thing as cleaning up. So my question to the Premier is, will she stop trying to cover up her scandals—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I was quite lenient up to that point. The member is accusing another member. Please withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw, Speaker.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm very glad that the justice committee has completed its report. The report is clear on a number of points. The report is clear that the large-scale energy siting process—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville will come to order—second time.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It happens all the time.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, come to order—second time.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That doesn't happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And if you continue, it will be a third time, and the last.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy is not helping.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There were a number of findings that I think make it clear that the work of the committee really did unveil some of the challenges that we were confronting. The large-scale energy siting process failed. The costs were unacceptably high, record-keeping was inadequate, and new rules were needed for the minister—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —new rules were needed for the minister's office staff.

The fact is that there are 16 recommendations that are designed to improve the siting process and improve records retention. Those recommendations are very important, and I'm glad that we've got them as a result of the committee's work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There is something seriously wrong when the Premier's office is trying to distract people from a criminal investigation into a bribery scandal in Sudbury with a billion-dollar gas plant scandal and its criminal investigation.

Politicians owe it to the people of this province to do much better. Using one scandal with a criminal investigation to distract from another scandal and criminal investigation is pretty darned cynical.

When will this Premier take the responsibility seriously, clean up her government, clean up her office, and clean up her party so we can start getting into the issues that really matter to the people of this province?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fact is, two and a half years of work that this committee did—there were over 400,000 pages of documentation that were looked at; there were 93 witnesses that came forward. As the process rolled out, we worked to change some of the rules that we knew needed to be changed, to change the siting process, to change the rules around document retention.

Now we have the recommendations of the committee, and there are further recommendations there that we can follow. The fact is, there were 16 recommendations that came out of the committee's work. The NDP, to their credit, actually put some recommendations in their minority report. Strangely, the opposition, the Conservatives, had no recommendations except to continue to meet.

The fact is, we have those recommendations. We will follow them, and we appreciate the work that all the committee members did.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The fact is named Peter Faist. That's what the fact is that these Liberals will not let come into this House.

This Premier, though, insists—in fact, she kept insisting that she was going to be so different and she was going to clean things up around here. Yesterday, she stood up in this House to protect her deputy chief of staff, whose actions are part of a criminal investigation by the OPP in the Sudbury by-election.

The gas plant report shows that the Premier protected Dalton McGuinty's deputy chief of staff, whose actions are part of a breach-of-trust investigation by the OPP.

The Premier said she was going to be different. So why is the Premier doing the same things all over again?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When I came into this office, I said clearly that we would open up the process around the committee. We did that. That's why the com-

mittee met for two and a half years. That's why there were 93 witnesses and 400,000 documents that were read.

I said that we would get to report-writing once the election was over. The NDP decided on the timing of the election. They decided when the election was going to be. We went through the election. We were clear that we were going to have report-writing. That report-writing has happened. We have—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Finished?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Yes.

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Liberal gas plant report claims that the blowing of \$1.1 billion came down to “inadequacies of record-keeping and document retention policies and training.” As my friend Peter Kormos would have said, bullspit. Liberals deleted emails and they got caught—end of.

Yesterday, the Premier said there was “no specific offer” made to Mr. Olivier. I call bullspit again on that, Speaker. The Liberals told Olivier, “Name your price,” and they got caught.

The Premier tried to cover up the gas plant cover-up. Will she come clean with the Sudbury by-election scandal or will we just see more cover-ups?

Interjections.

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

I'm trying my best to ensure that I'm listening very carefully to all questions and all answers. I'm going to ask temperance when it comes to language and to try to bring it to a decorum here that allows us to go without having to be called to order. I'm not doing that right now, but all I'm asking for is a little temperance when we deliver our questions and answers.

Please?

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

On the second part of the leader's question, in terms of the Sudbury by-election, I've been very clear. I've answered that question a number of times in terms of having made a decision to appoint a candidate and then working to keep a past candidate involved.

Let me go to the first part of the question, which was about the report of the justice committee. Regarding the cost of the relocations, the opening of the report says, “it is clear that the cost was unacceptably high.” I agree with that. Regarding local input, the report says, “It is clear that communities have not been sufficiently engaged in the large-scale energy siting process.” I agree with that. The report and the Information and Privacy Commissioner said, “not enough was done to ensure that ministers’

and Premier's office staff were aware of their record retention responsibilities." I agree, Mr. Speaker.

The fact is, those recommendations that flow out of those insights are very important. We have taken action on many of them, and we will take all of them very seriously.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, there is an old saying that you're entitled to your own opinion, but you're not entitled to your own facts. Ontarians deserve the facts.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Why don't you live by that saying?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development, come to order a second time.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Who made the decision to offer a job—any job—to Andrew Olivier so that he would stop seeking the Liberal nomination in Sudbury? Who did that, Speaker?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The characterization that was just expressed of what happened in Sudbury is simply not the case. That is not what happened. Here's what happened: I made a decision as the leader of the Liberal Party—it is my prerogative, and I made a decision to appoint a candidate in Sudbury. That candidate was Glenn Thibeault. Having made that decision—

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: People, I'm not finished here.

Having made that decision, there were attempts to keep a young man who had run for us in the previous election—to keep that young man involved. There were no specific commitments. There were no specific offers. There were offers and suggestions about what he might consider in order to stay involved. I would expect any leader in this House to work to keep someone involved who had run for them in a previous election.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier keeps insisting that there was no offer made to Andrew Olivier. There was, Speaker. Pat Sorbara offered him "a full-time or part-time job at a (constituency) office" or "appointments to boards or commissions." The Premier keeps insisting that she'd already made up her mind to appoint her candidate, but Pat Sorbara told Andrew Olivier that the Premier was in fact weighing her options.

1100

We are confronted with two versions of the truth: Pat Sorbara's and Gerry Loughheed's version, and the Premier's version. It's apparent that somebody here is not being quite truthful. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Premier: Who is it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The conversation to which the leader of the third party refers is a conversation that took place after I had already had a conversation with the former candidate about the fact that I was going to appoint a candidate, and that candidate was not going to be him.

The attempts to keep him involved were just that: They were suggestions about things that he might apply for, that he might consider in order to stay involved, just as I expect that the leader of the third party had conversations with Jonah Schein and Paul Ferreira about keeping them involved when they failed to win their seats back. I expect that she had similar conversations.

That was the conversation I had with Andrew Olivier. That was the conversation that Pat Sorbara had. I expect—

Interjections.

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier. Premier, when we asked you yesterday about allegations that you, and specifically your deputy chief of staff, offered taxpayer-funded positions in return for a political favour, you told us that you were only working to keep the candidate involved in the party—eight separate times. Premier, isn't this just code for getting Andrew to step aside, endorse Glenn, shut up and obey?

Premier, can you tell Ontarians whether it was the full-time job in the constituency office, the part-time job in the constituency office, or the government appointments to boards or commissions that you and your deputy were offering to keep Mr. Olivier involved with the Liberal Party?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said a number of times, the conversations that took place about keeping the former candidate involved were conversations in the context of a decision having been made about an appointment. The fact is that the authority that I have as the leader of the Liberal Party is an authority that comes from the party. We have a constitution. The constitution allows me to appoint a candidate.

The fact is, I had made that decision that I was going to appoint a candidate. That candidate was going to be Glenn Thibeault, so there was no question of who the candidate was going to be. The only question was whether the past candidate wanted to stay involved in the party in any way. That's what the conversations were about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: The Premier can BS us all she wants in this House, but—

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

Mr. Michael Harris: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I have now made a decision in my mind. I will not accept that term, because what you cannot say indirectly, you will not say directly, and it impugns that.

Please finish.

Mr. Michael Harris: Sitting across from the OPP, she'd better start telling the truth.

Premier, you said you'd be different. You said you were committed to accountability, committed to transparency. Today you lead a government under the cloud of three separate OPP investigations—a record, Premier.

Your deputy chief of staff is clearly heard on tape, clearly understood by people across Ontario to be offering a taxpayer-funded job to Mr. Olivier.

Premier, you say the duties of the deputy chief of staff are separate from the ongoing investigation, but that's just the point. Your deputy crossed that line the moment she offered Mr. Olivier a government job.

Premier, tell your "never retreat, never explain, never apologize" deputy chief of staff to resign today.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, let's just go over what happened. The fact is that I made a decision to appoint a candidate in the Sudbury by-election. Having made that decision, there was an attempt to keep a young man who had run for the party involved.

As I suspect, I hope that someone over there is going to be talking to Paula Peroni and hoping that she might stay involved in the party. Or maybe you just cut her loose.

What we want to do on this side is keep people involved. Glenn Thibeault was going to be the candidate. The attempts to reach out to the past—

Interjections.

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question, Speaker, is to the Premier. When did the Premier decide she was going to skip an open nomination process in Sudbury and appoint her candidate from a boardroom here in Toronto?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I go back to my comments earlier about the fact that we have a constitution in the Liberal Party that gives the authority to the leader to appoint a certain number of candidates. That's part of the decision of the party. I have that authority and I made that decision in this case. Because we had the possibility of having Glenn Thibeault as our candidate, I made the decision that I would make that appointment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Again, Speaker, to the Premier: That's not what the facts show. When Pat Sorbara called Andrew Olivier on December 12, she said to Andrew Olivier the following: "force the Premier to move to the appointment process if that's the only option...." That was the quote. She said—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Two things: Number one, the dialogue that's going on between members of the two caucuses at the back will stop.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I bring order to the House, sir.

And the second thing is, let's try to tie this into government business, please.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Again, when Pat Sorbara called Andrew Olivier on December 12, she said to Andrew Olivier, his actions would, "force the Premier to move to the appointment process if that's the only option avail-

able." She said to Andrew, "you've been ... asked by the leader and the Premier to make a decision to step aside to allow Glenn to have the ... opportunity uncontested."

So the question is that there are two stories here. The Premier claims she made up her mind previously, but the facts in regard—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The deputy House leader will come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me, your time is up.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think it's time to kind of step back and think about the decision the Premier made to appoint a candidate, an extremely fine candidate who has served the community of Sudbury very, very well over the past six years as an MP.

The Liberal Party of Ontario has a constitution that gives the leader the right to appoint candidates. She exercised that right because Glenn Thibeault, although he did represent a different party—I know that's a sore point for the party opposite—he represented his community extremely well. We have brought that into our caucus, into our government, into this Legislature.

The focus of the party opposite on this personal destruction—and it's not just as the House came back, the whole campaign they ran was based on destruction of an individual. We're proud of our—

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

Interjections.

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

New question.

POVERTY

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is to the minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. In September, you launched Ontario's second Poverty Reduction Strategy, Realizing Our Potential.

Building on the successes of our government's first strategy, Breaking the Cycle, released in 2008, the new strategy contains many measures to fight poverty, including expanding health benefits and nutrition programs for children in low-income families, creating a local poverty reduction fund to support organizations that achieve outcomes for people, and reducing child poverty by 25%.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to see the new strategy sets the bold, long-term goal of ending homelessness in Ontario, a goal that the minister shares with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Through you to the minister responsible for our Poverty Reduction Strategy: Can you please give this House an update on what our government is doing to reach our goal of ending homelessness?

1110

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the honourable member for this very important question, Speaker. As the member mentioned, our new Poverty Reduction Strategy sets the long-term goal of ending homelessness in Ontario. It's the right thing to do and it's the smart thing to do, because having a place to call home gives people a stable foundation from which they can build their lives back up again and rise out of poverty.

Currently, there is no consistent definition of homelessness. We have no consistent methods for counting the number of people who are homeless in Ontario, but we do know that we have a problem, and we are determined to resolve that problem. We need expert advice, and that's why we've announced a new Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness, shared jointly between the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and myself. They're going to give us practical, actionable advice and expertise to help us define and move forward on this very important commitment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you to the minister for her answer. In addition to her work on the file, I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been instrumental in the fight against homelessness in Ontario. Commitments in the new Poverty Reduction Strategy, such as the \$42-million increase to the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative and the \$16 million for 1,000 new supportive housing spaces for Ontarians living with mental health and addiction issues, demonstrate that we are already making strides when it comes to reducing homelessness. The Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness is the next logical step in crafting an evidence-based approach to achieving our long-term goal of ending homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, to the minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy: Can you please give my constituents and this House more information about the panel?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thank you to both the honourable member and the minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. As the minister mentioned, the creation of the new Expert Advisory Panel on Homelessness means that our government will, in fact, have the tools it needs to pursue an evidence-based approach to eliminating homelessness in Ontario.

The panel consists of 13 members who reflect Ontario's geographic diversity and have a wide range of experience and expertise, including people with lived experience of homelessness, people with expertise in aboriginal youth homelessness, people with technical expertise in homelessness data and measurement, people with subject matter knowledge and expertise, and people with knowledge of the current Ontario practices in measuring homelessness locally.

The panel will also engage additional experts and groups, such as youth, newcomers, seniors, aboriginal people and the LGBTTQ community.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday was another sad chapter in the ongoing saga of the gas plant scandal and the Liberal Party's coordinated efforts to delete emails and wipe hard drives with the tabling of your whitewashed, sanitized report by your committee.

Late last year, under cover of darkness—Christmas break and darkness—it was announced that the Liberal Party would repay the \$10,000 that the government had paid Peter Faist to destroy hard drives and delete emails in your office.

Premier, Peter Faist is the boyfriend of the former deputy chief of staff who is now under a cloud of darkness for giving false testimony to the committee. This is further evidence that taxpayers' money was used inappropriately by your Liberal government and another example of your lack of leadership. Will you commit to restrike the gas plant committee so that we can finish the job of getting to the bottom of your scandal?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, we are glad that the justice committee has completed its work. I want to thank all the members of the justice committee, who have done tremendous work over the last three years in making sure that we get good information as to how decisions were made around the gas plants. Speaker, as you are aware, the gas plant committee has listened to about 93 witnesses, some of them multiple times. They received almost half a million pages of documents, including about 30,000 pages of documents from the Premier's office. As a result of all that work and deliberation, they have provided a critical assessment of government record-keeping practices and the way in which large energy projects are sited. We look forward to evaluating and implementing those recommendations provided.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, I could say that that was a shiftless response but I'll say it was a responseless shift. It brings up three words. It could be summed up in three words: failure of leadership.

Let's be honest with what this cheque from the Liberal Party was all about. Your party paid Peter Faist, the boyfriend of Laura Miller, former deputy chief of staff, to eliminate evidence in a criminal investigation and destroy property belonging to the people of Ontario, and to prevent this House and the OPP from getting to the bottom of your gas plant scandal.

The report submitted yesterday changes nothing. This is not over. Through the power of your majority, you

forced the committee to produce an incomplete report. Will you commit to re-striking the committee and allow us to investigate and question Laura Miller, Peter Faist and David Livingston, the key players in this scandalous cover-up?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Start the clock. The member for Stormont will come to order. The member from Renfrew—I have to say it—will withdraw.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. We should let the OPP do their job. Our job is to make sure that we look at the 16 substantive recommendations that have been provided by the justice committee and make sure that we implement those recommendations.

I'm glad to see that there are some really important recommendations that are provided in this report regarding the cost of the relocations and making sure that we have extensive and substantive engagement with communities where large infrastructure projects are planned to be sited and better record-keeping practices.

We have been working, over the last couple of years under the leadership of this Premier, in making sure that we're making all the necessary changes in terms of better staff training for mandatory record-keeping training and in passing an accountability act which has stiffer penalties around deletion of records. I'm actually very sad to see that the opposition parties provided no substantive recommendations after the incredible amount of work that was done in this matter.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Premier, can you confirm whether you directed Pat Sorbara to offer Andrew Olivier a full-time or a part-time job at a constituency office or appointments to boards or commissions, and are those job offers still on the table for Mr. Olivier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Premier has, on several occasions, discussed this particular issue.

I did this yesterday and I'm going to do it again today because I have a feeling that not everybody was really paying attention to understand what a fine new colleague we have in this Legislature. We offer our congratulations. It is the tradition of this House that a new MPP, regardless of whether they're on your side or someone else's side, is given the courtesy of respect and congratulations.

Who is Glenn Thibeault? Who is this all about? Well, throughout his career he has shown an unwavering commitment to a better, fairer Sudbury. I have a feeling that the member from Nickel Belt knows better than most of us the contribution that our new member has made to Sudbury. He has fought tirelessly—

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Back to the Premier: When Gerry Lougheed spoke to Andrew Olivier, he began the conversation by saying, "I come to you on behalf of the Premier."

Premier, can you confirm that you authorized Gerry Lougheed to make offers to Andrew Olivier on your behalf?

1120

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, what we're witnessing is the same negativity that voters have rejected. Voters have rejected the kind of negativity that we are seeing expressed in this House today. The by-election campaign that was run by the NDP—and, apparently, the PCs, to the extent that they ran a campaign—the negativity was rejected.

The people of Sudbury made a decision. They made a very good decision. They made a decision where all of the information was presented to them. The public has said that they demand more. They reject the negativity of the opposition, and they elected someone who will make a positive contribution to the lives of people in Sudbury.

Glenn Thibeault, the member from Sudbury, has a very strong and positive record in driving change. We welcome him and look forward to the contribution he will make here in the Legislature.

Interjections.

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

New question.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and poses a threat to our infrastructure, food supply, drinking water and our economic competitiveness.

But climate change is a problem with a solution. While the opposition has refused to put forward meaningful solutions to this challenge, our government has taken action, closing Ontario's coal plants, curbing the use of cosmetic pesticides and protecting 1.8 million acres of land with the greenbelt. These initiatives have resulted in fewer smog days and cleaner water for all Ontarians.

I was pleased to see last week that the minister has launched a climate change discussion paper and invited Ontarians, businesses and communities to share their thoughts on how we can best combat climate change while continuing to grow our economy.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Could the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change inform this House about the nature of his discussion paper and the consultations with Ontarians?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's particularly helpful to have people like the member from Cambridge, who is a nurse, who understands the health implications for families—Lyme disease—and it's great to have such a

champion in the House who understands the dimensions of this.

The Premier and I and the Minister of Natural Resources, the Minister of Infrastructure, the Minister of Economic Development, the Minister of Health—our entire cabinet, Mr. Speaker, our entire caucus understands that the biggest, most important issue we're facing for our families and our children is climate change. We are fast-tracking to a four-degree mean temperature change on this planet in the latter half of this century. That is the biggest challenge we, as human beings, have faced in our entire history.

We're also seized with the economic opportunity. As John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, said, we will be seeing a \$6-trillion expansion of the western economy—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: —thank you very much, Mr. Speaker—and that opportunity is also unprecedented. We want Ontario to lead in this new economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Minister. I'm really pleased to see that our government is continuing to build on the progress that we've already made in reducing greenhouse gases and fighting climate change while helping our businesses to increase their productivity and competitiveness, to build on our strong economic growth.

I note that the climate change discussion sets out a bold vision which would:

- establish Ontario as a leader in climate change mitigation and science;
- redesign and build strong, carbon-neutral economies, communities, infrastructure and energy;
- protect ecosystems, including air, land and water;
- leave a legacy of a healthy world for our children—my children—and future generations.

I know my constituents in Cambridge have many great ideas for Ontario's upcoming climate change strategy and how they can reduce their carbon footprint while helping to make Ontario's economy stronger and more competitive.

Speaker, could the minister inform the House how Ontarians across the province can join the conversation on climate change?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I certainly can and am very happy to. We are going to every corner of the province: Thunder Bay, Ottawa, southwestern Ontario. We will be engaged in direct conversations with Ontarians—regular folks, municipal leaders, labour leaders, business leaders, environmentalists, families, moms, dads, grandmas. This is everybody's conversation, and it has to land well.

This is the second time we've done this. Our Climate Ready strategy started this same way five years ago. I'm very happy to report to the House that our 6% reduction below 1990 levels has been achieved for 2014, and we know that we're going to meet our 2020 cut.

All members can participate and all Ontarians can participate by going to www.ontario.ca/climatechange, where all the paper and all the data are. We're going to be reading those and really building on the knowledge,

expertise and thoughtfulness of Ontarians to get this right economically and environmentally.

ELECTORAL REFORM

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Chief Electoral Officer Greg Essensa has repeated his call for limiting advertising by special interest groups during election periods. We support his recommendation. Mr. Essensa is an officer of this Legislature, and I respectfully suggest that all members of this House should be mindful of his advice. Premier, will you accept and implement the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: We are always open to conversations on ways to improve Ontario's democratic process. Ontario has rules in place to ensure that there is both transparency and free speech in our election campaigns. Third-party advertising rules were introduced in Ontario for the first time in its 2007 reforms to election legislation.

Under current rules, third parties that spend \$500 or more on election advertising are required to register with the Chief Electoral Officer. Registered third parties must also report to the Chief Electoral Officer on election advertising expenses.

Mr. Speaker, I'll say this: When they were in power, they did nothing. In 2007, Ontario, for the first time, in its reforms, put those rules in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Premier: In the last election, special interest groups spent \$9 million on political advertising. That's more than 19 registered political parties combined, and three times more than was spent in 2007. Under your watch, Premier, the deep pockets of the well-connected special interest groups win, while democracy and the citizens of Ontario lose. This is a direct violation of the principle of equality—one person, one vote—that is fundamental to democratic government. Free speech should be free.

Premier, you can't justify buying free speech or allowing it to be bought. You know it's time to bring Ontario in line with the rest of the country on electoral reform. Premier, will you cap third-party advertising spending? Yes or no?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, we always welcome the good recommendations of the Chief Electoral Officer. For the first time, as I said, Ontario, in its 2007 reforms to elections, introduced third-party advertising rules. This was done in 2007. We're always looking for good advice from the Chief Electoral Officer. I'll say that this party was very quick to put some rules around election advertising. We always welcome his good advice, and we will take that into consideration.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. The Premier says that she had made

up her mind to appoint Glenn Thibeault before offers were made to Andrew Olivier. That's not what Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed are saying. They are saying that offers were on the table and no decision—

Interjections.

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

Please continue.

M^{me} France Gélinas: They said that offers were on the table and that no decisions had been made. This is what the Premier is claiming. Yesterday the Premier said, “I had, in my role as the leader of the Liberal Party of Ontario, made a decision to appoint a candidate in Sudbury” and “I had already made the decision to appoint.”

My question is simple: When did you make your decision to appoint?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

1130

Hon. Deborah Matthews: When the member from Nickel Belt got up to ask a question, I was sure she was going to ask a question about health care. I was sure that there were issues in this province affecting people in her community and beyond and that she wanted to have the opportunity to put that question to the minister. I was sad to see that she is continuing the theme of negativity and personal attacks that we've seen from both parties.

I want to congratulate the member from Sudbury. I want to congratulate the people of Sudbury for choosing such a fine representative to send to Queen's Park. This is a citizen of Sudbury who has, time and time again, demonstrated his worthiness. The people of Sudbury made a thoughtful, informed and wise choice, and we look forward to working with the member from Sudbury as he works to improve the lives—

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back to the Premier: Here are some of the facts. Gerry Lougheed said to Andrew Olivier on the tape that everybody can listen to, “The Premier, up to now, has always said to me she's in favour of a nomination race. So I want to make that ... clear; she's never said to me, ‘I want to appoint ...’” Glenn Thibeault.

Pat Sorbara says exactly the same thing. To Olivier she says: “You've been directly asked by the leader and the Premier to make a decision to step aside ... you recognize, then, the position that we're going to find ourselves in here, right? Where she's”—the Premier—“going to have to make a decision around the appointment, right? Versus letting this go ahead.”

The question is simple: When did you make the decision to appoint?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As somebody said earlier: Pot, meet kettle. The NDP decision to install Adam Giambrone—you might remember Adam Giambrone in 2013—is well known. The Toronto Star reported that Giambrone was “parachuted into the riding”—you might remember this—“allegedly stacking the nomination

meeting.” It's obvious that the third party has hired past candidates, past MPPs. That has been mentioned before.

Let's go back to the quality of the candidate who was elected by the people of Sudbury. Glenn Thibeault has fought tirelessly for supports for people with developmental disabilities, for quality services for families struggling with autism. As director of the United Way—how much more grassroots can you get than that?—he led many successful campaigns in support of community development. He's a proud volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters, something I share with him, and he has coached minor hockey and football, which I have not done. He's a fine new member—

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

DISASTER RELIEF

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister, we all remember the ice storm of December 2013 so well. It caused widespread damage and blackouts across southern, western and eastern Ontario, and at its peak left over 800,000 hydro customers without power. Many of the members in this House, including yourself, Minister, know this first-hand from the storm's impact on our own communities.

In my own riding of Davenport, many residents were left without heat and power for several days. A warming centre was opened at J.J. Piccininni Community Centre on St. Clair Avenue.

In response, our government announced that it would offer a one-time ice storm assistance program. Your staff has now received all 58 applications from the municipalities and conservation authorities seeking reimbursement through the program.

Last Friday, your ministry shared an important and long-awaited update. Minister, please tell this House how our government is moving forward in support of these—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the honourable member for that question. Yes, of course I remember. I remember something else. I remember the incredible efforts of all the municipal and EMS staff who were out there building a stronger community by reaching out to their community. I want to start by complimenting them.

The province has initiated final payments to three municipalities: the townships of Mapleton, Centre Wellington and Puslinch. Here's some more good news: The other 52 municipalities and six conservation authorities that have submitted claims have been offered an interim payment, and most have availed themselves of that opportunity, which is really good, so they can get on with the task of continuing to build that strong, caring community that on a good day we all in this House want to see happen.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Minister, it's wonderful to hear that municipalities that have been waiting for assistance with their public costs will be able to benefit from support. I know I speak for the municipal leaders in Toronto when I say they have been eagerly awaiting these funds.

Reimbursement will go towards costs incurred to protect public health and safety, and to secure access to public roads, sidewalks and frequently travelled routes. These interim funds will also assist municipalities with their budget planning.

These interim funds will be welcome, but can the minister tell us why the ministry isn't flowing the full amounts municipalities have requested yet?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: We initiated these interim payments now because we didn't want municipalities to wait any longer for at least a partial reimbursement of those expenses that they have. By the way, the interim payment has been very, very well received by municipalities.

It's important that we begin flowing these interim funds so that they can get on with the remainder of their claims, so that we can adjudicate those as quickly as we can without disadvantaging them in any real way. We're going to flow funds in a responsible way, ensuring that public dollars are spent wisely.

And as I explained earlier, the feds are involved in this, too, so we've got two sets of accountability mechanisms here. Each claim is going to be reviewed carefully, and as soon as we get that adjudicated, the full payment will be delivered to municipalities as they're hoping for.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, I'm very concerned about the state of Ontario's health care system and the availability of doctors in my riding.

Under your imposed contract with the doctors in Ontario you're prohibiting new doctors from joining family health teams in well-serviced areas. However, your government's model in defining well-serviced areas is extremely flawed.

My riding has been experiencing a shortage of doctors for a number of years. The cities of St. Thomas, Aylmer and Rodney have lost up to six doctors, and in fact the municipality of Dutton/Dunwich has only had one doctor for a number years.

Minister, too many people in my riding are without doctors. In fact, a number of the doctors in my riding will be retiring in the next three to five years, and your current model of family health teams will not allow for succession planning.

Minister, can you share with me your plans to address the doctor shortage that you have created?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you for the question opposite.

Actually, I have good news, because what we're doing with the changes that resulted from the OMA's refusal—

to walk away from the table after a year of negotiations and not accept the fair offer that was presented to them and the fair offer that was recommended by, frankly, the umpire that we brought in, retired judge Warren Winkler, who was our conciliator aiming to bring the two parties together: He said that the government's offer was a fair offer and implored the OMA to accept our offer as well, feeling that it was fair.

But what we've done with our family health teams for our important family doctors who are graduating is precisely what you're asking for: We're directing those resources to those parts of the province that need them most, to the underserved areas, the areas where there are doctor shortages, where we need to make that added effort, to make sure that our family doctors—that broad family health team, the professionals that provide that important care—go to those areas of the province that need it most.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Minister, what's not fair about the system is the fact that your system classifies my area as well-serviced, which it's not. It's flawed, and under this new decision you've made with the Ontario doctors, doctors cannot come to my riding.

Minister, it's clear that you have no plan for the health care system. You're ignoring groups like the Ontario Medical Association, who want to work with you, who have plans to make the system better. Not only has your government stopped new doctors from joining family health teams, you have now threatened doctors—to penalize them—who see too many patients.

Minister, the baby boom generation is growing. It's a tremendous increase on the usage of our health care system, yet your government cut services and access to health care in order to balance the budget.

Minister, why are you cutting health care to make your government's financial budget commitment?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I don't quite know where to start. We aren't cutting health care. The health care budget continues to increase year over year, as it has for many, many years.

The physician services budget, which is currently at \$11 billion—10% of every dollar that this government spends in the province—that fund for physicians specifically is going up by 1.25% next year, 1.25% the year after that and 1.25% the year following.

We are increasing health care; we're committed to our family health teams. More than three million Ontarians currently have access to a family health team.

But quite frankly, I'm disappointed at the question, because we worked hard and diligently and with good-faith intentions with the OMA for over a year—a year and a day, to be exact. Retired Judge Warren Winkler came forward as an independent umpire. He took our side, Mr. Speaker. He asked the OMA to accept a fair offer.

GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Huron–Bruce on a point of order.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Speaker, I'd like to draw to the House's attention that this morning, the Minister of the Environment announced the Great Lakes Protection Act outside of the House at Ripley's Believe It or Not aquarium. Is it not the privilege of the House to hear of acts being called forward in the House before anyone else hears it? Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for her point of order. I would remind all members that I have no authority over when and where those announcements are going to be made. However, I would also say to the government and to the specific minister that the tradition of the place is always to make those announcements here in the House.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex on a point of order.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my privilege this morning to introduce to our legislators, from earlier in the public gallery, Alysson Storey, from Chatham–Kent–Essex, who is here visiting Queen's Park today.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'd actually like to correct my earlier record of introduction. I'm pleased to introduce Katherine Bowes, who I had said was the mother of former page Amber Bowes. Amber is our new page; her sister Ashley Bowes was our former page.

I'm pleased to see her back and to congratulate Amber on her first day in the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The record has been corrected.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Cambridge on a point of order.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's my privilege to welcome today, in the gallery, Christine Rier, president of ACO Cambridge, who is there with a lot of my friends from ACO.

I had seen Jean Haalboom, a former Waterloo regional councillor. She has left the gallery, but I know she was here. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes.

This House stands adjourned until 3 p.m. this afternoon. That usually means now is the time when everybody stands still.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Arriving any minute in the House are two great people from Bruce county, from the Chepstow area—the Cargill area specifically—Rachel and Sherry Anstett. It's great to have them in Toronto today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. We welcome our guests.

Further introductions?

Seeing no further introductions, it's now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAIRY BREEDING AWARDS

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: In early January, Holstein Canada announced the equivalent to the Oscars of the dairy industry, the 2014 Master Breeder awards. The recipients across Canada are recognized for having mastered the art of breeding balanced dairy cattle, with high production and outstanding conformation with great reproduction, health and longevity.

There were 21 recipients of the Master Breeder Shield, with 12 breeders specifically from Ontario, seven from Quebec, one from Manitoba and one from British Columbia.

One recipient worth noting is from my riding, Albadon Farms in Teeswater, Bruce county. Owned by Josh and Marjan Ireland, as well as parents Mark and Debbie, Albadon Farms has a herd of 170 milking cows. As one of the top-producing dairy herds in Canada, they were also chosen as the best-managed herd from Ontario to British Columbia in 2012.

This is a testament to the good work being done at Albadon Farms, and it's rare that such a large herd has accomplished this level of excellence.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that this achievement has been all homegrown by the Irelands of Albadon Farms just south of Teeswater, Ontario.

SEX TRADE WORKERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I stand because, on December 6, the Harper government tabled Bill C-36. It was a response to a Supreme Court decision to strike down all existing prostitution laws because they put sex trade workers' lives in danger. Unfortunately for sex trade workers, the new law doesn't correct the situation but makes it worse, forcing the trade underground and putting women's and men's lives at risk.

In response, we held a media event here in December. Alice Klein, from Now magazine, and sex trade workers' organizations were here, plus they were buttressed by 190 legal and constitutional law experts, calling on the Premier and our Attorney General here to act.

Sex trade workers and their organizations have spoken to me about the dangers, the risks they face—the same dangers and risks, ironically, that the original Supreme Court decision was supposed to address.

I ask the Attorney General, on their behalf: They have tried several times for a meeting; the least you can do is meet with them.

I've asked Premier Wynne—several times she's spoken about this. The least you can do is meet with them. They would like to share their concerns, their questions and their suggestions with you. Please do it before these vulnerable people are hurt any more.

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Speaker, it's Heritage Day. I rise today on Heritage Day to pay tribute to ACO Cambridge. I'm a past president of this branch of the provincial body, the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario.

ACO Cambridge, a not-for-profit organization, was founded in 1971 by citizens aghast at the demolition of the stone Central school. Founding members Pat Rosebrugh and Jean Fayle are still involved in the mission to promote the preservation of buildings, neighbourhoods and natural areas that are of architectural, historical and cultural significance.

As a result of years of advocacy work, Cambridge boasts three heritage conservation districts, many buildings designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, a heritage master plan, a fundraising annual heritage house tour, and a city that's much more inclined to preserve its built heritage and cultural landscapes that surround the Grand and Speed Rivers. Op-eds and letters to the editor increase awareness on heritage issues.

Cambridge enjoys increased tourism and economic benefits, such as the revenue from the film industry that often uses our stone streetscapes as a filming backdrop, such as for Murdoch Mysteries.

Christine Rier, the president of ACO Cambridge, is here meeting with other members today to discuss the importance of preserving our collective provincial heritage.

Speaker, I'm extremely proud to be part of the successful organization that ACO Cambridge has become. Happy Heritage Day.

VOLUNTEERS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Speaker, road safety is an ongoing concern for all members of this Legislature, and I just want to highlight the efforts of some of the local volunteers whose tireless efforts help make roads in my community safe every year.

Over the Christmas holiday season, Home James volunteers provided a safe ride home for those who had perhaps a little too much Christmas cheer and needed a ride. Not only do they get you home safely; they will also drive your car home, and, if needed, they will even escort

you to your door. On New Year's Eve alone, they drove 246 people home, more than doubling the total from the previous year, just on New Year's Eve. Coordinator Jodie Hogg was quoted by media about the success of the program. She said, "It's always a good time. You never get the same story from helping people out."

Recently, at an event in my riding, I learned that there were a total of 98 people who gave many hours of their evening time to Home James. To thank them for their efforts, these individuals received a special certificate from my office in recognition of the time they sacrificed, thus contributing to the huge success of this program.

Home James just completed its third year in Chatham-Kent, and on the evenings when they offered their services in the month of December, both the Chatham-Kent Police Service and the local OPP indicated that they had zero road fatalities. So you see, Speaker, as a critic for community safety, I'm so grateful that this organization helps to keep my community safe. By the way, there is always room for more communities in Ontario to take up the Home James program. This initiative will keep families intact and their communities safe, especially during the Christmas season.

So again, a shout-out to the volunteers, the organizers and the corporate sponsors who helped make this successful. Thank you.

DAUGHTERS FOR LIFE FOUNDATION

Ms. Catherine Fife: Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." On January 13, I attended a ceremonial signing at Wilfrid Laurier University, formalizing a partnership between the university and the Daughters for Life Foundation. This partnership will enable Laurier to sponsor two women from the Middle East as they pursue undergraduate studies.

The Daughters for Life Foundation was founded by a professor of global health at the University of Toronto, Dr. Abuelaish, in memory of his daughters Bessan, Mayar and Aya, who were killed by an Israeli tank shell during an attack on the Gaza Strip in 2009. The foundation honours the girls' love of learning and is built upon the idea that educating young women will build lasting peace in the Middle East.

Sixty-six million girls worldwide are currently deprived of basic education. Many more are removed from school before completing secondary or post-secondary studies. When women and girls are educated, it impacts not only their own lives; it impacts the lives of their family members, their children and their communities. When women have access to education, they are better able to speak out about injustice, about their rights and their visions for their communities. Education empowers women to better act as agents of peace.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Abuelaish for his incredible courage and his vision, and thank Dr. Gavin Brockett and all of the Laurier students who took this idea and turned it into a reality for their school and com-

munity. We'll be a stronger community because of it. Thank you very much.

LENT

Mr. Joe Dickson: The holy season of Lent commences today, Wednesday, February 18, which is known specifically as Ash Wednesday. You will see several foreheads similar to mine with the sign of the cross, the crucifix, made from ashes.

During these holy days, penance is to be considered an important requirement of the Christian life. Fulfillment of this duty involves prayer, works of piety and charity, and self-denial by fulfilling one's obligations more faithfully and especially by observing the prescribed fast and abstinence.

In the Roman rite, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fasting and abstinence from meat, and all Fridays during Lent should remain free from meat. The law of abstinence from meat binds those who are 14 years of age and older. The law of fasting binds those ages 18 to 59. One full meal and two smaller snacks a day are allowed during fasting.

1510

Lent ends in 40 days on Easter Sunday, and that's April 5. Three important days at that time are Good Friday, April 3, when our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified and died on the cross; Holy Saturday, April 4, when the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the tomb was in progress; and the celebration of Easter Sunday, of course, is April 5. Forty days after the resurrection, one of the most significant days in the Christian calendar, Ascension Thursday, comes, when our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven.

May you have a holy Easter some 40 days from now.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Last Friday I met with several community care access centre workers on the picket line in North Bay. Their message was clear, Speaker: They don't feel respected by the government; their clients aren't getting the care they need; and they want accountability in the way CCAC funds are being used. Their passion and commitment to the people they serve are heartfelt, and they deserve to be treated with dignity by this government.

My riding of Nipissing has seen a series of health care and education cuts in recent months due to this government's failed fiscal management. In total, nearly 130 full- and part-time jobs have been slashed at the North Bay Regional Health Centre, including 68 RPNs. This assault on front-line care also includes the elimination of pharmacy techs, operating room attendants and personal support workers. At Nipissing University, 22 professors are being let go, following the layoffs of 16 support staff in December, with a third stage of restructuring in the works.

This government continues to say one thing and do the other. It's cuts, not jobs. To this government, I say, after your billion-dollar gas plant scandal and billions wasted on poor infrastructure procurement, don't you dare try to balance the books on the backs of the workers of Nipissing.

EVENTS IN OTTAWA-ORLÉANS

ÉVÉNEMENTS DIVERS À OTTAWA-ORLÉANS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: On January 27, the people of Ottawa-Orléans were able to participate in a momentous cross-partisan community event. I had the pleasure of co-hosting the first annual east-end New Year's levee along with my federal and municipal counterparts: MP Royal Galipeau; our mayor, Jim Watson; Deputy Mayor Bob Monette; and councillors Stephen Blais, Jody Mitic and Tim Tierney.

J'aimerais remercier sincèrement le nouveau membre de l'équipe d'Orléans, le conseiller Jody Mitic, pour avoir été le chef de file de cette belle aventure.

The east bloc, as we are now being called, decided some time ago to reaffirm our commitment to work in a collaborative fashion to tackle the issues that affect our community. Greater collaboration has been one of my biggest commitments since my election. It is why I moved my office close to the local councillors and the MP: in order to support one another and best serve the people of the great riding of Ottawa-Orléans.

The event was a success, and many pounds of non-perishable food items were raised for the Orléans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre.

I'm so proud to be part of this community and team as we work to make Orléans the best place to live, work and play.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Earlier this month we gathered to celebrate the beginning of Black History Month with the Kingston African and Caribbean Collective, their irrepressible president and Kingston gem Judith Brown, and guest speaker CBC News's Adrian Harewood. We remembered the past in all its pain and glory and we celebrated the achievements and contributions of black Canadians throughout history. We spoke of translator Mathieu Da Costa from the early 1600s to the lovely and inspiring multi-world-champion athlete Perdita Felicien, whom I had the good fortune to meet yesterday.

Of particular note this year was that on January 21 we celebrated Lincoln Alexander Day right across this country for the first time. Alexander was our first black member of Parliament in Canada in 1968 and he became the 24th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario in 1985.

If we celebrate the extraordinary achievements of any minority or oppressed group, we must also assume responsibility to continue their struggle. We must be

ever-vigilant to combat racism and persecution and embrace our diversity in the halls of power, in company boardrooms, in our communities and around our dining tables.

We must not stop until we have done everything in our power to fight for justice and equality for all.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup. Meegwetch.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, assumes ballot item number 29 and Ms. Elliott assumes ballot item number 30.

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would also like to take a moment just to remind you that over the last two days we've been hearing some buzzing that's going on with people's devices. I would ask you not to lay it on your desks as, even if the mike's not on, it seems to reverberate very loudly here. I don't want the Sergeant-at-Arms to feel like he's got to get up and steal everyone's items.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SAFE ROUNDABOUTS ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES CARREFOURS GIRATOIRES

Mr. Harris moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to provide rules for the use of roundabouts / Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour prévoir des règles régissant l'utilisation des carrefours giratoires.

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. Michael Harris: Today I introduce the Safe Roundabouts Act, 2015, to enable the Minister of Transportation to make regulations establishing rules of the road that apply to roundabouts across the province.

The act further directs the minister to conduct a study about the safe use of roundabouts, and consult with members of the public before making any regulation. To that end, the minister is required to table a progress report in the Legislative Assembly every year until a regulation is made.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DES GRANDS LACS

Mr. Murray moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 66, An Act to protect and restore the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River Basin / Projet de loi 66, Loi visant la protection et le rétablissement du bassin des Grands Lacs et du fleuve Saint-Laurent.

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 minister for a short statement.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: This is the third time we've introduced this bill in the House. It's strengthened; it's got more character and more mustered behind it. I look forward to working with all members of the House on our side and also with my critics, the member for Huron–Bruce and the member for Windsor–Tecumseh.

As I've said many times, I think this is a bill that's above politics. We care about the lakes passionately, and I hope that we can work together to produce a very fine piece of legislation that all of us will look back on as a gift to our grandchildren.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

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

"Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that doesn't necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 more annually for affordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

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"Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

"Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

"Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

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

"To abandon the idea of introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses."

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

FIRST RESPONDERS

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas emergency response workers (paramedics, police officers, and firefighters) confront traumatic events on a nearly daily basis to provide safety to the public; and

“Whereas many emergency response workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their work; and

“Whereas Bill 2 ‘An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder’ sets out that if an emergency response worker suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, the disorder is presumed to be an occupational disease that occurred due to their employment as an emergency response worker, unless the contrary is shown;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to unanimously endorse and quickly pass Bill 2 ‘An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder’.”

I couldn’t agree more with the thousands who have already signed. I’m going to give it to Riley to be delivered to the table.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers’ resources;

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

“Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario’s economy and create jobs in three ways:

—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries.”

I agree with this petition, affix my name and give it to Inaya.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

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

“We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital.”

I approve of this petition. I sign it and give it to page Natalie.

HOSPITAL PARKING FEES

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas accessibility to our public health care system is a foundational value of Ontario; and

“Whereas all individuals should have equal access to health care services regardless of their ability to pay; and

“Whereas patients requiring health care services often have to drive to a hospital to receive these services; and

“Whereas hospitals are increasingly using parking charges as an avenue for revenue generation thereby impacting some patients’ access based on their ability to pay; and

“Whereas the Liberal Party promised during the 2014 election campaign to cap hospital parking fees;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to demand that the government of Ontario follow through on their commitment to cap parking fees at Ontario’s hospitals at a level that ensures equitable access to health care.”

I couldn’t agree with this more. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page Vaughn to bring to the Clerk.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

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

“Whereas Scarborough–Agincourt is one of the few ridings without a ServiceOntario office in the riding;

“Whereas some residents of Scarborough–Agincourt live outside the maximum service area of the nearest ServiceOntario office;

“Whereas Scarborough–Agincourt is the home of a growing population of seniors, the oldest community in Scarborough, many of whom are mobility-impaired or have limited access to transportation;

“Whereas residents have filed numerous complaints with the constituency office about long wait times, inconvenient hours and the inaccessibility of the closest ServiceOntario office;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly call upon the government of Ontario to open a ServiceOntario office in Scarborough–Agincourt to allow its residents and businesses easy and efficient access to government services.”

I fully support the petition and I give my petition to page Andrew.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

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

“Whereas the current proposed OPP billing model will have a significant impact on our municipalities and the taxes paid by residents;

“Whereas the cost to households will increase by \$100 or more, which can be detrimental especially to low-income families;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: Please consider a different OPP billing model than that which is currently being proposed. If there has to be a change, it should be equitable and fair to all municipalities and any financial impact associated with it should be phased in over a longer period of time (i.e., a minimum of five years) so as to alleviate any financial burden this will cause families throughout the province.”

I agree with this, sign my name and give to it page Niko.

FIRST RESPONDERS

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

“Whereas emergency response workers (paramedics, police officers, and firefighters) confront traumatic events on a nearly daily basis to provide safety to the public; and

“Whereas many emergency response workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their work; and

“Whereas Bill 2 ‘An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder,’ sets out that if an emergency response worker suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, the disorder is presumed to be an occupational disease that occurred due to their employment as an emergency response worker, unless the contrary is shown;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to unanimously endorse and quickly pass Bill 2 ‘An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder.’”

It is my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page William.

DISTRACTED DRIVING

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government is committed to ensuring the safety of drivers, passengers and pedestrians

on Ontario’s roads and making the province North America’s most cycling friendly jurisdiction; and

“Whereas, on average, one person is killed on Ontario’s roads every 18 hours, and one person is injured every 8.1 minutes; and

“Whereas drivers who use cellphones while driving are four times more likely to be in a crash than non-distracted drivers; and

“Whereas evidence has shown that Ontario’s impaired driving laws need to be strengthened to apply sanctions for driving under the influence of alcohol to those impaired by drugs;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, as soon as possible, Bill 31, the Making Ontario’s Roads Safer act, 2014.”

I’m going to affix my signature to this. I agree with it and will pass it on to page Julie.

HEALTH CARE

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

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s lack of priority funding is causing the closure of the South Bruce Grey Health Centre restorative care Chesley site as of May 1st, 2015; and

“Whereas in three years, the 10 beds dedicated to this program have seen over 300 patients utilize the program and at this time there is a waiting list for this successful program; and

“Whereas currently over 83% of patients are discharged from the restorative care program to home after a two- to eight-week program which has prepared them to confidently return home, recognizing this program increases their quality of life through the regaining of strength, balance and independence; and

“Whereas the closure of this program will deprive seniors and other eligible clients from the many health and mobility benefits that the restorative care program offers; and

“Whereas the alternative to the restorative care program will see patients staying in active medical beds longer, while they wait for long-term care; and

“Whereas the return of investment on the restorative care program far exceeds conventional approaches when considering the value of quality of life in the patients’ own home as compared to a long-term-care facility; and

“Whereas it is our understanding that the CCAC has cut back its services enabling patients to remain confidently in their home;

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

“That the South Bruce Grey Health Centre restorative care Chesley site be recognized for its success; and for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to showcase this program as a model to be followed across the province; and

“That the closing of the South Bruce Grey Health Centre restorative care Chesley site on May 1st, 2015, not proceed and the provincial government support this health care model with base funding as an investment in the health and welfare of patients so they can confidently remain in their home.”

1530

I totally agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it to the table with our new page Riley.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Wow. That was a long one.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My petition is “Save Our Schools.”

“Whereas the provincial government is applying enormous pressure to close and sell off schools in Toronto, while cutting provincial education funding by up to \$500 million;

“Whereas schools provide tremendous public value as community hubs, beyond the traditional use of classrooms;

“Whereas the provincial government's calculation of school usage is flawed and inaccurate because it ignores the use of schools for child care and adult education; and

“Whereas forcing school closures will make life more difficult for families in Toronto by reducing access to child care programs and eliminating public green space;

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

“That the province of Ontario immediately recognize that schools are important community hubs, amend the utilization formula to include the full community use of schools, and make all reasonable efforts to support and expand the use of schools as community hubs before they are closed and sold.”

I'm signing this petition. I support it and I will be giving it to page Andrew.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario is home to over 400,000 first-, second- and third-generation Hispanic Canadians who originate from the 23 Hispanic countries around the world; and who have made significant contributions to the growth and vibrancy of the province of Ontario;

“Whereas October is a month of great significance for the Hispanic community worldwide; and allows an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate future generations about the outstanding achievements of Hispanic peoples to our province's social, economic and multicultural fabric;

“We, the undersigned, call upon members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming October of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month and

support Bill 28 by MPP Cristina Martins from the riding of Davenport.”

I agree with this, affix my name and give it to page Eileen to bring forward.

AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

Mr. Jim McDonell: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the University of Guelph's Kemptville and Alfred campuses are two of Ontario's outstanding post-secondary agricultural schools; and

“Whereas these campuses have delivered specialized and high-quality programs to generations of students from agricultural communities across eastern Ontario and the future success of the region's agri-food industry depends on continuing this strong partnership; and

“Whereas regional campuses like those in Kemptville and Alfred ensure the agri-food industry has access to the knowledge, research and innovation that are critical for Ontario to remain competitive in this rapidly changing sector;

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

“That Premier Wynne ... act immediately to reverse the University of Guelph's short-sighted and unacceptable decision to close its Kemptville and Alfred campuses.”

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

FOREST INDUSTRY

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

“Whereas Resolute Forest Products has closed their mill in Iroquois Falls, Ontario;

“Whereas Resolute Forest Products has indicated it's intent on demolishing the mill and restoring the site to a green space;

“Whereas residents of the town of Iroquois Falls want assurance that the Ministry of the Environment will ensure that all environmental standards met and maintained in the decommissioning of the site;

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

“That the Ministry of the Environment closely monitors the decommissioning of the Resolute site in Iroquois Falls to ensure that the area is ecologically sound for future use.”

I fully agree, and will sign it and send it down with page Morgan.

WIND TURBINES

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

“Whereas residents of Ontario want a moratorium on all further industrial wind turbine development until a

third-party health and environmental study has been completed; and

“Whereas people in Ontario living within close proximity to industrial wind turbines have reported negative health effects; we need to study the physical, social, economic and environmental impacts of wind turbines; and

“Whereas Ontario’s largest farm organization, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario have called for a suspension of industrial wind turbine development until the serious shortcomings can be addressed, and the Auditor General confirmed wind farms were created in haste and with no planning; and

“Whereas there have been no third-party health and environmental studies done on industrial wind turbines, and the Auditor General confirmed there was no real plan for green energy in Ontario and wind farms were constructed in haste;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows.”

And that’s the conclusion of it. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The time for petitions is over.

Orders of the day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE RÉGIME DE RETRAITE DE LA PROVINCE DE L'ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 17, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 56, Loi exigeant l'établissement du Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): When we last debated this, I believe the member from York–Simcoe had the floor. Member from York–Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: It’s a pleasure to be able to continue where I left off yesterday on Bill 56.

What we’re debating here is Bill 56, the government’s new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan scheme. I just want to quickly recap my speech from yesterday. The following outlines why this proposal should be abandoned.

First of all, the government is using the ORPP to distract from the real economic crisis in Ontario: the \$300-billion provincial debt and \$12-billion deficit. Government debt is increased by \$1.4 million every hour—\$33 million every day.

The government has not provided any economic analysis of the ORPP. Does the government have any interest in how many jobs will be lost?

The government has not identified exactly who will be forced to join the ORPP; they have not defined “comparable workplace pension plan,” and this is certainly something that many people have responded to.

The government has not divulged how much the ORPP will cost to administer.

The government has not identified what will happen with self-employed Ontarians.

The government has tried to convince the public that the ORPP will operate like the Canada Pension Plan when, in fact, it will be modelled on the Québec Pension Plan.

The government has not been clear with Ontarians that their \$29-billion infrastructure plan cannot happen without the ORPP.

The government has eroded public trust so deeply by their decade of billion-dollar scandals in spending and mismanagement that people do not trust this government with another dime of their hard-earned income.

Finally, I have not received any indication from any Ontarians or Ontario businesses that they are in favour of this proposal. I have only received lengthy well-researched letters in opposition to the Ontario Registered Pension Plan.

During my time today, I will focus on three main problems with this proposal.

The government has not defined who will be forced into the ORPP by not defining what a “comparable workplace pension plan” is.

Two, the ORPP will not help the people who need it most, such as widowed seniors or those on minimum wage.

Three, the ORPP will force employers to cut employee hours and jobs in order to maintain a competitive edge in today’s highly competitive economy. The ORPP will increase our unemployment rate that has been above the national average for six years.

I referred a moment ago to the stakeholders who have contacted me. I want to take some time today to air their concerns, because these are the people who must consider the ramifications of any legislation, and they are the ones who are looking at it from the point of view: “How does this enhance our quality of life and the strength of our economy in Ontario?”

The first quote I am going to use—these come from the pre-budget hearings last month. This one comes from the president of the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association. He said the following, regarding the impact of not including defined contribution plans in the ORPP: “A balanced approach will be needed to ensure that the ORPP doesn’t undermine existing plans and disadvantage Ontario workers. The very real risk is that Ontario workers will be worse off if employers with already attractive plans find themselves unable to continue those plans if they are required to offer the ORPP.”

1540

The president of the Investment Funds Institute of Canada said, “If group RRSPs are not provided a comparability exemption, we expect that the introduction of

the ORPP will cause many employers to rapidly discontinue their group RRSP programs, negatively impacting individuals savings habits.”

The senior vice-president of the Air Transport Association of Canada said, “Most flight schools are small, marginal operations which could ill afford a 4% increase in wage costs, which is usually the largest operational expense that a flight school will face.”

The vice-president of the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada said, “Is it yet another step that undermines the overall competitive position of manufacturing in the province? If manufacturing, generally, is undermined, that’s going to have significant impacts on us.”

One of the groups who had the most to say was the Ontario Chamber of Commerce: “Mainly, the chamber and our members have been worried about the potential negative impacts of the ORPP on the business climate. Chief among those concerns is the added cost of business that the ORPP presents, on top of ... other cost drivers that businesses in the province have been experiencing over the past few years, things like higher electricity prices and a higher minimum wage. All those things add to the cost of doing business and actually potentially negatively impact business competitiveness relative to other provinces and neighbouring states.

“The government, to our thinking, has yet to show any ... evidence to the contrary, and until it really does so, we’re convinced that the ORPP shouldn’t go ahead. We really want to see the government come out with an economic impact analysis of how the ORPP will impact Ontario’s economy.”

The Trillium Automobile Dealers Association said that the government’s “payroll tax, as we call it, will make it more expensive to hire people, and that’s not a good thing. So we’re very concerned.

“Again, it takes money out of the auto sector.”

The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters said that “it’s another burden and it’s another cost that employers and employees, those who can least afford to pay it, will now have to incur....

“We’re concerned that things like high electricity rates and the new costs associated with the new pension will take us further away from being able to leverage full opportunity and advantage for the province.”

Ontario’s Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association said, “A disaster—it will be a disaster. The industry is struggling right now....

“It will set back Ontario, going backwards, and at the end of the day, will contribute to the deficit. At the end of the day, instead of improving the deficit, it’s going to escalate it.”

The Retail Council of Canada said, “When I talk to small business, they say, ... ‘this is going to cost me \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year. How are you going to get that back for me?’ Because businesses are struggling today to survive, and so they’re looking for offsets.... They’re looking to minimize the hit because the alternative is that they have to reduce staffing costs, labour costs or a percentage of sales, and if the sales aren’t there to support,

they’re going to reduce the number of people who are working in the retail environment.”

The CFIB also had considerable ideas to suggest. I’d like to highlight the voice of Canada’s small and medium-sized business community, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. The CFIB presented its sound analysis of the ORPP at pre-budget hearings held by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs less than a month ago. At the hearings, the CFIB vice-president, Mr. Plamen Petkov, commented on the lack of public understanding of the ORPP proposal: “I’m not quite sure, though, that the average Ontarian actually understands that this is going to be money coming from their paycheque. I think they are going to realize that after they see that deduction in 2017 onwards.

“I think there is a big education component here that is missing from the whole debate on things such as, it is not a free plan; it is not something that the government is giving to the people; and there’s also the fact that it’s going to take 40 years of contributions to actually get the benefit....

“So it is really a combination of different charges that, as a small business owner, you either have to take from your payroll, meaning reducing your labour force, or you have to pass it on to your consumer, meaning raising prices. If you keep raising prices you’re not going to be competitive and you’ll be out of business pretty soon.

“Over the last week or so, we saw reports of big companies, multinational chains, exiting Canada and Ontario because they are not competitive. They cannot stay competitive. The same is valid for a small business. If you start raising your prices to absorb some of these costs, you’re not going to make it too far.”

I admire the credibility of the CFIB as well as the frankness of its vice-president. In order to give more strength to the CFIB, they sent a letter to Ontario’s Associate Minister of Finance conveying a number of grave concerns with this proposal. This is the most important section for the record: The ORPP “represents a 40% increase in the pension premiums they”—Ontario’s businesses—“currently pay to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Regardless of whether you call these contributions a premium, a tax, savings, or an investment, one thing is clear—these will be a mandatory charge on employers’ payrolls and on their employees’ paycheques....

“The vast majority (86%)” of respondents—Ontario’s business owners—“oppose the implementation of the ORPP.”

The CFIB did a poll to see what employers would do if the plan was forced on them. “The respondents indicated that in order to cope with the added cost of ORPP contributions, 69% would be forced to freeze or cut salaries and 53% would have to eliminate jobs. At a time when the provincial economy continues to stagnate, this type of plan would certainly create significant financial hardship for small businesses and the people that they employ, especially for those who are already finding it tough to operate day to day....

“The analysis shows that this mandatory pension plan would cost Ontario 160,000 person-years of employment. As well, it would increase the province’s unemployment rate by 0.5% by 2020 and would permanently reduce wages in the longer-term.”

The peak annual employment loss amounts to 42,000 jobs lost in the year 2020.

CFIB continues:

“(1) If implemented, the ORPP will severely undermine the ability of Ontario’s job creators to grow their businesses and continue offering new jobs to Ontarians....

“(2) The ORPP targets mostly small business owners and their employees.

“The current proposal exempts those with defined-benefit (DB) plans from contributing into the ORPP. This means federally regulated industries, big businesses and most public sector workers will not be impacted by this new mandatory premium. It is unfair and rather cynical that those that will be exempt from the plan are its loudest cheerleaders....

“(3) Forcing additional pension contributions reduces income available to cover essential goods and services for Ontario families.

1550

“As we have discussed previously, the issue of insufficient retirement savings for segments of the Canadian society has resulted not from a lack of savings options or motivation to set more money aside for retirement, but from a lack of disposable income.... Ultimately, any new or additional taxes or fees would reduce Ontarians’ ability to pay for essential goods and services such as food, rent or mortgage payments.”

The ministry has a chart which shows how the payments would come for people. They’re based on a 40-year time.

Number (4) says, “This is a point which has not been broadly communicated by the government. Any increase in the future disposable income of the retired is offset by the decline in the disposable incomes of those contributing today. This is only made worse by the fact that the working poor would be asked to contribute even though this would lower their entitlements to existing social security supplements (i.e. clawing back OAS and GIS), which replace close to 100% of the income for that segment of society.

“(5) Ontarians don’t trust an entity at arm’s-length from government to manage their retirement savings. Opposition for the ORPP can be further explained by the questionable past performance of existing public pension funds, many of which already carry ... unfunded liabilities to the tune of billions, and have required the injection of public dollars in order to meet pension obligations.... The structure of the current proposal begs the following questions: What would happen to an underfunded ORPP? Who would be responsible for any shortfalls? Ultimately, taxpayers would be on the hook for shortfalls and would bear a significant portion of the risk, as has been demonstrated time and again.”

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business’s opposition is strongly echoed by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, including 50 municipal chambers of commerce—the Fraser Institute and C.D. Howe have warned against the ORPP—the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association, the certified professional accountants, Primerica financial, the Progressive Contractors Association, the Investment Funds Institute of Canada, the Air Transport Association of Canada, the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada, Trillium auto dealers, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, the Retail Council of Canada, the Ontario Home Builders’ Association, small and medium-sized businesses, citizen groups, municipalities, statisticians, and public policy and business academics.

One such public policy academic who has been sounding the alarm over the proposal is Jack Mintz, the University of Calgary director and Palmer Chair in Public Policy. Here is a quote from his article from last Friday:

“It is far from clear an expansion of CPP, QPP or the ORPP is at all needed for the broad population.

“In fact, a mandatory Ontario pension plan could do more harm than good.

“First, once taking into account personal taxation and income-tested programs, the Ontario plan will discriminate against low-income seniors and some others in middle-class ranges.

“Low-income seniors will be taxed on Ontario pension income as well as lose GIS payments, 50 cents on each dollar. For a senior with \$20,000 in income, barely above the measured poverty line, the Ontario pension plan will be reduced from \$2,848 to \$1,424 with the loss in GIS and a further \$584 by federal and provincial tax payments, leaving only \$740 to cover rent and food. While working, the person would pay the same payroll tax rate as others but would end up with a pretty [bad] after-tax return on the asset”—the ORPP.

“Second, any mandatory scheme has bad consequences for those who do not need it. Young families trying to save for home equity will need to pay into a plan that is a less important retirement asset at their stage of life. Others who invest in businesses and other financial opportunities will have to face new taxes.”

The third issue: The ORPP “will be expensive to operate.... Ontario will need to track migrants in and out of the province. It will also need to administer the plan on its own. It will also lead to large unfunded liabilities, adding to provincial debt, if payroll taxes do not cover benefits.”

These stakeholder voices of reason need to be listened to by the government.

One of the issues that has been suggested is that the ORPP is modelled after the Quebec pension, not the CPP. To expose the problem with collecting pension funds with the—

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: Oh, sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There seem to be some lovely conversations going on, and one that's really remarkable is someone from the other side holding court over there—really amazing. If you want to hold court, at least do it on your side.

I would appreciate a little quiet. I can't even hear the poor member from York–Simcoe, because there are nine sidebars going on.

So keep it down, and if you want to talk, go outside. After all, it is your member who's speaking. Thanks.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Julia Munro: In comparing the CPP and the Quebec pension—it's found in their legislative mandates—their investment strategies flow from very different places, with very different exposure to risk and very different priorities.

The objectives of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board are given in section 3 of the act. It says:

“(a) to assist the Canada Pension Plan in meeting its obligations to contributors and beneficiaries...;

“(b) to manage any amounts transferred to it ... in the best interests of the contributors and beneficiaries” of the plan; and

“(c) to invest its assets with a view to achieving a maximum rate of return, without undue risk of loss, having regard to the factors that may affect the funding of the Canada Pension Plan and the ability of the Canada Pension Plan to meet its financial obligations on any given business day.”

To carry out its objectives, it operates at arm's length from the government and is armed with a strong set of governance safeguards against any real or perceived political interference in its operation.

On the other hand, the Quebec caisse is “to receive moneys on deposit as provided by law and manage them with a view to achieving optimal return on capital within the framework of depositors' investment policies while at the same time contributing to Quebec's economic development.”

As the National Post editorial board put it last month, pension plans are meant to benefit those who contributed to the plans, not the governments that created them.

It is clear the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is the wrong idea at the wrong time. Many organizations and individuals have put forward thoughtful suggestions to help Ontarians retire with dignity, which the government refuses to embrace. Such ideas are to:

—control government spending and reduce taxes to allow Canadians to contribute more towards retirement savings;

—create new incentives for people to save, like a one-time match for RRSPs or TFSA's;

—allow individuals to voluntarily contribute more towards their retirement;

—increase RRSP and TFSA contribution limits.

Those are just a few of the things that could be done.

While a new mandatory pension plan is seen as extremely burdensome and unaffordable, there is clearly some support for voluntary options, such as the PRPP.

As the collected voices of people who have deep concerns, we strongly urge the government to carefully examine the impact that this proposal would have on Ontario's job creators. If the government is determined to move forward with this ill-advised plan, despite the evidence that small business owners, their employees and other Ontarians alike cannot afford it, then the following amendments are suggested:

—exempt employers with defined contribution plans, RRSPs, group RRSPs, PRPPs;

—increase the minimum earnings threshold to \$30,000; and

—exempt smaller firms with fewer than 20 employees from contributing.

1600

As I complete my response to the second reading of Bill 56, I want to leave you with some final thoughts and concerns I have identified throughout the remarks. The data exists which challenges even the need for an ORPP. The threat of a 1.9% paycheque deduction and a matching employer payroll tax is a dangerous threat to jobs and a healthy economy, as is the absence of clarity regarding comparability of existing pensions and no answers to questions about timing, eligibility and financing.

Finally, as revealed in the 2014 budget, the real objective of Bill 56 is contained in the following quote: “... Ontarians to save through a proposed new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, new pools of capital would be available for Ontario-based projects such as building roads, bridges...”

The government needs to re-examine Bill 56. People from all walks of life, from a wide background, have all joined in unison to demonstrate the unintended consequences for the province and its citizens. Premier, people see this scheme as a dire threat to the fragile stability of this province's economy. The public needs more financial analysis and less conjecture. The public also needs to know the truth: that your \$29-billion infrastructure spending plan cannot go ahead without the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to comment on the member from York–Simcoe. I think when we have debates like this, you actually see how fundamentally differently we do see the world, ultimately.

I think there are a few things that we need to remember. One is that this is the first stage of this legislation. In many respects, there has been a lot of discussion about why this part is actually coming right now, and it's permissive in nature—it sort of gives us permission to talk about pensions, when we actually always had the ability to talk about pensions. Clearly, we do not see them as the dangerous, evil force of nature which is going to fall upon the province of Ontario, because we recognize as a party, as do many economists, that income security and savings in this province is not just an emerging issue, it is upon us right now, and that it is

incumbent upon governments to be progressive in the way that they plan for the future, for all people in the province.

I think when we quote people, as well—I mean, we will quote people like the Centre for Policy Alternatives, who recognize that women are inordinately affected by a lack of savings because they actually fall victim to more precarious, part-time, contract work. They don't have the savings that the member from York–Simcoe mentioned. Their ideas around retiring with dignity will not happen—for people to more voluntarily donate money to their retirement plans—if they don't have jobs, if they are living in that low-income, precarious place in the province of Ontario.

I wouldn't hold out hope that this government is going to save more money and pass it along the line, because there has never been a government which has wasted as much money as the Liberal government of Ontario in this past Legislature.

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

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member from York–Simcoe for her remarks. Also, I know that, as my critic for this file, she's very passionate and concerned about the issue of retirement security. I've bumped into you at a number of events when we're both really listening to the best that's out there.

We know that Ontario's pension system is strong. What we want to ensure is that we prepare for the future. I believe that there are many things that you've said in your remarks that we can agree on, and that's that after a lifetime of working, people deserve to retire with comfort and with dignity. It's important that we take the steps necessary to ensure that that actually occurs.

I do want to just remind the House that we have taken a look at the economic impact of the ORPP or a supplemental plan. David Dodge, the former governor of the Bank of Canada, has done an analysis. When we look at the long-term implications, having consumption in retirement is very important to Ontario's economy. It ensures that people will continue to spend into retirement on those very same everyday needs that they have. It's important that they have that continuous stream of income coming in, and that is what a pension offers.

We are absolutely modelling this on the CPP. We're mirroring the key features of that plan as closely as possible. I've been out consulting right across this province, getting the best information that we can to ensure that we build and design the best plan possible for the people of Ontario. I want to thank you for the work that you're doing on this file and helping us to strengthen Bill 56. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's an honour to again rise in this House and to address the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act. In listening to debate from all parties, I have some very serious concerns about this particular plan, and I'll tell you why. I've been privileged to have spoken

with a number of businesses from the Chatham–Kent riding, and these businesses are very concerned by what it's going to cost them above and beyond. Where does that money come from? The money obviously comes from their bottom line. In addition, a lot of the individuals themselves will end up with less take-home pay, because they will be taxed at 1.9% of their earnings, provided they're earning over \$35,000 a year.

But, you know, there are a few other things as well. I think that perhaps this government, if they spent more time concerning themselves with the number of unemployed people, which is 600,000 people in the province of Ontario, the high unemployment, the debt and deficit, and getting that in order, as opposed to this particular pension plan—with all due respect to the Associate Minister of Finance, sometimes I think we're told what we're supposed to say and do.

But you know what? Years ago, before I got involved in politics, I was self-employed. Does that mean, then, that because I was self-employed, as an employee of my company I would have to pay 1.9% and then, because I am now the employer of my company, an additional 1.9% on top of that as well? That hasn't been fully brought out yet.

The last thing is—and this question hasn't been asked yet—what about MPPs in this Ontario Legislature? We have self-directed pension plans. We don't have a pension plan per se, so that then means that the Ontario Legislature will have to pay 1.9% of total earnings? That's 1.9% times our salaries times 107—questions that need to be answered.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'm happy to have the opportunity to comment on the remarks made by the PC Party critic, the member from York–Simcoe. Our critic, Jennifer French, will be up shortly. She will be delivering a leadoff speech of one hour, doing a critique of the bill, noting what's useful and what's weak. I'll leave that to our critic.

But I want to speak to some of the key arguments made by the PC critic. This is one of the richest societies in the world; it is. It's extraordinary. Go to any other part of this globe and you will see that Ontario is extraordinarily rich. But on a regular basis I go and talk to seniors in my riding. You talk to seniors in your ridings. The last year is the first time I've ever had people come up to me and say, "We need price controls on food." That's a shocker. Price controls on rent? I understand that. Price controls on energy? I understand where people are coming from. But when people are feeling squeezed to the point where they're calling for price controls on food, you're talking about a pension system that's not working.

I'm not saying that what the Liberals have put forward is the solution—again, I leave it to our critic to go into those details—but if I followed the PC analysis on this, we never would have established medicare. If it wasn't existing today, what arguments would be made against

it? I think that they very much would be the arguments that have been set out by the PC critic on this: that if we had medicare, people would be unemployed; if we had medicare, Ontario's firms wouldn't be able to compete. That does not make sense in terms of delivering a society that we all want to live in with dignity and some security. **1610**

So I think we're going to debate this bill; I hope we can improve it. But the approach that we shouldn't have publicly funded pensions is wrong.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I thank the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, the associate minister, and the members from Chatham-Kent-Essex and Toronto-Danforth for their comments.

I don't think I said that I was as opposed to a public pension. What I did say was that with this one, the mechanics, as we know, have some serious, serious problems that people have identified.

The member for Kitchener-Waterloo and I would agree on the importance of jobs. The concern that has been raised by so many in looking at the way that this bill is structured means that it would cost jobs. In small business, people are looking at essentially 4%—3.8%—and they don't have anywhere for that to come from, unless they are going to be able to cut their costs, which may then translate to jobs or raised prices, in which case they run the risk of pricing themselves out of the business.

As far as the member for Toronto-Danforth talking about the rich society, it's very clear in remarks that I gave that there are people, who I quoted, who are concerned about seniors and people like that who do not see this as the right tool. That's the thing that I think is important to understanding what is the basis of my concern: that it may, in fact, harm the very people that it purports to help.

So I'm pleased that I have been given the opportunity to take part in this debate.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is always my distinct privilege to stand in this Legislature and bring the voices of Oshawa with me, but on this occasion it is my privilege and my responsibility to speak as the NDP critic for pensions on behalf of the two thirds of Ontarians who do not have a workplace pension, and to speak for those who deserve to feel secure in their retirement.

Pensions have always been a vital piece of our economic stability and the cornerstone of financial security in retirement. Today, I will be speaking on Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

Ontarians deserve the right to retire with dignity, and the next generation is not going to be taken care of. Two thirds of Ontarians do not currently have a workplace pension. Some Ontarians with insufficient workplace pensions still will struggle into retirement. It is difficult

to imagine that the majority of our aging population will not have the resources to pay their own way, to afford housing, to buy necessities, to contribute to the economy or to live with dignity. It is a pretty grim reality that we are facing collectively.

We have a retirement savings crisis in Ontario. Whether we are talking about retiring seniors, those in the prime of their working lives or the next crop of workers to come, we need to be doing more.

In 2012, the median income for Ontarians over the age of 65 was \$26,720, or \$2,227 per month. To put that in perspective, the average monthly cost for seniors' housing in Ontario last year was over \$2,750. That's more than \$500 short every month only taking housing into account. We cannot allow this to be the future for our seniors.

And what about our youth? The government simply isn't doing enough to address youth unemployment in this province, and it is worrying. Talk is cheap. Not only do we need to take action now, but we need to start planning for the future. How on earth can our youth, without employment, start to save for retirement when they can't even pay their tuition bills today?

Debt continues to balloon, jobs don't just appear, and future stability is not on the horizon. If their own government doesn't have a strong plan for the future, how can the youth of today be expected to plan for themselves?

I am pleased to serve Ontario as the NDP pension critic. I look forward to working to hold this Liberal government to account when it comes to the future financial stability of workers, whether they are General Motors pensioners in my riding of Oshawa or Ontarians across all of our constituencies.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Eglinton-Lawrence is a little loud.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I hope we will see this government re-evaluate and reprioritize its retirement savings initiatives and prioritize Ontarians over financial institutions. I honestly hope we will actually see this Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and not just hear about it. We implore this government to design and implement a progressive public pension plan for hard-working people across Ontario who deserve one, and stop focusing on exceptions and exemptions and start focusing on helping more Ontarians. All Ontarians deserve the right to retire with dignity, and I am here today to remind the government to keep this principle at the forefront as we continue to debate the details of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, I am truly humbled by the opportunity to stand in this chamber and speak at length about an issue that is so significant to all Ontarians and to our province as a whole, and I am honoured to speak on behalf of the NDP and the rich history of support our party has shown to the pension movement in Ontario and across Canada.

In 2009, New Democrats reached out to constituents all over the province to learn directly from Ontarians

about what changes were needed in Ontario's retirement system. While those consultations were more than just window dressing, arguably unlike the government's recent round of consultations, we ultimately came to the same conclusion. Despite the fact that the government opted not to support the Ontario retirement plan as proposed by the NDP in early 2010, we are pleased to see that they've come around and found the value in this concept and the need for proactive action.

Our work on fairness issues, such as retirement security, is what first attracted me to this party, and it's because of the core principles of collective good that I am standing here as a New Democrat. As a teacher, I was fortunate enough to find myself in an occupation that provided a good and reliable pension, and as a New Democrat, I believe that opportunity should be extended to all people. As New Democrats, we have always believed and will always believe that all Ontarians should have access to a strong defined benefit pension plan. For those who don't have one, it is our duty as representatives of this province to provide it.

It's important to note that the ORPP will not solve all the problems that ail the pension system in Ontario. As we work to address the retirement security crisis in this province and acknowledge the need for proactive solutions, we must also address the existing gaps in our system if we want to make the most significant possible change. It's important to add new tools for delivering security in retirement, but that doesn't mean we can ignore the problems that are right in front of us today. We need to work within the existing system, as well, to ensure it is operating effectively and reliably.

The Canadian pension system is based on three pillars that are intended to provide reliable retirement security across the country. Pillar 1 is universal government benefits for seniors, also known as old age security, or OAS, the guaranteed income supplement, or GIS, and the Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System, or GAINS. Together, these three programs provide guaranteed income to all seniors to ensure at least a minimum standard of living. Pillar 2 is the Canada Pension Plan, or CPP, which provides a reliable benefit to all Canadian workers. Pillar 3 is employment pension plans and individual retirement savings.

Together, these three pillars comprise the backbone of a strong retirement income system in Canada. But the third pillar is failing us. Today, two thirds of workers in Ontario do not have a workplace pension plan, and those who do cannot always rely that their pension will be there when they retire.

This government has spoken at length about its enthusiasm for voluntary savings options such as PRPPs, but Ontarians are leaving millions of dollars of RRSP room on the table every year. In 2012 in my riding of Oshawa, 95% of those aged 65 or older received income from CPP, but only 9.4% received income from an RRSP. In terms of workplace plans and in terms of personal savings, the third pillar is failing. According to December's Auditor General's report, 92% of all defined

benefit pension plans in Ontario were underfunded at the start of this year, and over the past eight years, the total amount of underfunding of these plans has grown from \$22 billion to \$75 billion. This is not an insignificant problem. The fact is, we have a retirement security crisis in Ontario, and part of the reason for that crisis is that Ontarians don't feel secure that their pension will be there when they retire.

1620

Every day my office hears from constituents who are concerned about the security of their pensions. Their retirement plan is based on the belief that their pension—something they've contributed to their entire working lives—will be there when they retire. But as that date approaches, that assumption appears less and less certain. This is a sentiment I am sure that all of us have heard in our constituencies across the province.

Stories from the not-too-distant past, such as Nortel or Algoma Steel, and stories that are still playing out in front of us, such as US Steel in Hamilton, continue to remind us of the need for reform.

I would like to read part of an email I received from two former US Steel employees, and how the instability of their pension has affected their ability to plan for retirement:

"My wife and I are both retired from US Steel, but formerly Stelco employees. Conditions of our employment included a defined pension plan with benefits.

"I fully realize that things can change and steps may have to be taken to reduce financial losses by a company, but to do that on the backs of employees who have already given the better portion of their lives to help achieve the company's goals is not only unfair, but a broken promise of what was expected in retirement. Some retired earlier based on circumstances and calculations made by then Stelco. My wife was one of those. Now a shift in time later we are faced with a dilemma of a possible reduction in pension and benefits for both of us!

"If this happens, we will undoubtedly be in a dire situation faced with having to make many changes to get by. It definitely won't be the same lifestyle we planned on based on our pensions and benefits to date. This at a time in our lives when we shouldn't have to worry about whether we may have to go back to work at 65 or in my case 70 years old. And that's only if we can find work. This letter to you is intended to express our concerns about our future and what is being done by government officials to stop this injustice by US Steel.

"It seems US Steel has broken a few promises they made to the employees and the province when taking over Stelco.

"Let them find other ways to achieve their goals without putting their burden on the backs of pensioners....

"By the way it isn't the pensioners' fault the pension plan is underfunded."

I would also like to read a local comment that was sent to me through my website from a Sears retiree:

"I cannot understand why a government that is trying to create a pension plan for seniors in low-income situations cannot see the damage and future costs to its own budget related to even one large defined pension plan failure.

"The Sears situation is one example where I, myself, a 38-year retired employee, will be affected because of the lack of concern and action of the government. The government continues to allow large companies to defer the payments—top ups—into pension plans while all along allowing massive dividends to shareholders and fund managers."

The third pillar is only as strong as the regulations that support it. On that front, this government is failing. Retirement security isn't just about promising a benefit, it is also about ensuring that benefit is delivered. Though the ORPP will provide a necessary supplement to the existing pension system, that does not excuse the government from its obligations to effectively regulate workplace pensions.

The Auditor General made five recommendations for improving the state of Ontario pension plans during her December report, and we are still waiting to see the government act on any of them. In fact, I wrote a letter to the Minister of Finance on December 17, which I have here, calling on the government to adopt the AG's recommendations. Here is a piece from that letter:

"In her report, the Auditor General made five recommendations for improving the state of defined benefit pension plans in Ontario, such as providing the superintendent of FSCO the same powers as his federal counterpart. This is a matter of grave concern across the province and specifically for General Motors employees of my riding of Oshawa. I ask that you take the necessary steps to protect pensioners across the province and adopt the Auditor General's recommendations."

Though it's not the feel-good, headline-grabbing story that the government is looking for on the pension file, it's an important part of the puzzle for strengthening our retirement system.

But no plan is foolproof, and there are always unforeseen bumps in the road. There need to be fail-safes built into the system to ensure that if the parachute doesn't open, there's still something in place to cushion the fall. In the Ontario pension system, this comes in the form of the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund, or PBGF.

The PBGF was established in 1980 to ensure that when a company goes under and a pension plan is wound up, pensioners are not left bearing the full brunt of the impact. Under the current system, the PBGF will cover up to \$1,000 per month in lost benefits for a worker. Unfortunately, as we've seen in the Nortel and Algoma Steel examples, sometimes \$1,000 per month is not a sufficient safety net.

For workers, this means instability, it means insecurity, and it just doesn't cut it. Often the \$1,000 benefit guarantee is enough, but for a worker whose monthly benefit has been reduced by, for example, \$2,000, the inadequacy of the guarantee can mean the difference

between security and having to choose between paying their mortgage or their child's tuition.

Twice, my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek has put forward a private member's bill calling on the government to increase the benefit under the PBGF to \$2,500 per month, and twice his bill has stalled. For a government that is trying to show support for retirement security, this seems like a pretty simple way to show it. As I stated earlier, retirement security isn't just about promising a benefit, it is also about ensuring that that benefit is delivered.

I should note that my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and I aren't the only ones calling for this change. Harry Arthurs, the expert whom your government enlisted to review the state of the pension system in Ontario, first called for an enhancement of the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund in his 2008 report. As Mr. Arthurs noted in 2008, increasing the protected benefit to \$2,500 per month would simply reflect the effect of inflation on the original \$1,000 benefit. Seven years later and that number needs to be reviewed again.

So while the government continues to develop the new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, I ask that it also review the recommendations made by the Auditor General in her December report and the recommendations made by Harry Arthurs in his report in 2008. It might not be the exciting story that you're looking for, but it's an important part of the bigger picture that you can't continue to ignore.

The members on the government side sometimes groan and heckle when we talk about broken Liberal promises, but the question must be asked for the sake of two thirds of Ontarians without a workplace pension, for people living in a never-ending cycle of financial struggle and for people who deserve and want stability in their retirement—it must be asked for people who want to one day be able to retire. The question is this: Assuming we see this pension plan take shape and come to life, will it be the most progressive plan for the most people possible? Interestingly, we don't yet know.

Bill 56 appears to be a token bill that establishes a rudimentary framework and little else. Anything we think we know about this pension plan we have read in the budget or the Liberal discussion paper.

Bill 56 provides the following priorities: "The government of Ontario shall, no later than January 1, 2017 and in accordance with the parameters set out in this act, establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan." It also lays out that, at a later date, "The Minister of Finance or another member of the executive council shall introduce legislation that ... provides for the administration and investment management of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan through the administrative entity described in section 2;" and "provides for the requirements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, including the basic requirements."

So, essentially, this bill says that another bill is coming that will outline who will administer and manage the plan. We have been reassured by the government that

it will be an arm's-length entity. Let's make sure that it is.

Also in this bill is the schedule of basic requirements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Here is what we know: "Eligible employers and eligible employees shall contribute to the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan."

1630

We also find out a bit more about the obligation of eligible employers to deduct contributions. We find out about remittance to a yet-to-be-established administrative entity. We find out that the maximum threshold for 2017 will be \$90,000, and that the combined employer-employee contribution rate shall not exceed 3.8%. And we find out that some employees will be eligible and others will be exempt. Those with a comparable plan will be exempt. Retirement benefits shall be paid for the life of the plan member beginning at 65. There are a few more details, but certainly we are left with more questions—far more questions—than we have answers for.

So let's start with this question: Why the rush to table this flimsy, token piece of legislation when it accomplishes almost nothing concrete? Was it because it was tabled the same day as the insurance company- and bank-appealing PRPP legislation? Was it so that the government could appear to be offering a progressive option alongside a private financial product?

Regardless of the reason for the rush, here we are. We know that to develop the strongest and most comprehensive, progressive and inclusive pension plan for the most working Ontarians, there needs to be time and attention paid to working out the details, both broad and specific, which brings me to the government's publicized priority of public engagement.

The government spent time recently conducting round table public consultations around the province. I had hoped to have one in the Durham and Oshawa area, but, alas, there were only about a dozen consultations and we were not lucky enough to host one. However, it was my distinct pleasure to invite myself to the kickoff consultation in Kingston, Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I hope you will allow me a little walk down memory lane, if I may. I love Kingston. Kingston is one of my favourite communities. It was a dynamic city that I learned inside and out as a student living and studying there. I did my undergraduate degree there, and I have nothing but fond memories of the city and the beautiful landscape and the vibrant downtown. It's hard to believe that I graduated 15 years ago. I was a member of the graduating class of 2000. Fortunately, I was able to graduate with minimal and not insurmountable student debt. Tuition and living expenses were so much more affordable, and my parents were in a position to lessen my personal burden. I was very fortunate.

I cannot imagine the reality of students who are graduating now with a debt burden likely equal to the first mortgages of some of the MPPs in this Legislature. I can't imagine graduating with that debt burden into a climate of staggering youth unemployment and underemployment. I can't imagine graduating with that debt

burden and facing debt repayments, housing costs, transit costs, possibly dental costs, possibly child care costs and even consider saving for a wedding or a trip or for an eventual down payment to start building home equity, as we heard yesterday from a Conservative member was the solution, or to consider saving for retirement. How is someone facing that economic reality able to save for the future when the present is robbing them of a secure future? But I digress.

Back to the government consultation in Kingston, I think, to be fair, the government clearly outlined in their discussion paper what it was they were wanting to hear from Ontarians. The problem was Ontarians wanted to share more than was invited.

I'd like to read an email I received from a constituent on this very topic:

"Being 30, retirement seems like something very far away for myself and my soon-to-be wife. In fact, our retirement fund keeps getting dipped into with unexpected costs, like fixing my car or putting down a dear pet...."

"I heard of the difficulty people are having in trying to track down these public consultations about the Ontario pension plan the government looks to introduce.

"In fact, it seems really strange that the government would be introducing one of the biggest social programs our province has seen in a while and yet the general public barely gets a voice or a choice in how this program will work...."

"If the ORPP is to become a reality, it must be a plan in which all Ontarians benefit from!"

Hopefully the government will carefully consider and learn from the shared submissions and stories from across the province.

Some of the voices in that room in Kingston were likely sharing similar messages across the province. The business community was well represented and shared their perspectives, as did community members from local unions and neighbours with no affiliation but a vested interest in our shared future. People across the province have a lot at stake. There will be an impact on businesses, no doubt. But imagine the impact on those same businesses and community members when people are retiring in droves with no predictable income to spend in their communities. Imagine the downtown of any city, already challenged to do business in some cases. Imagine the downtown when no one feels free enough to spend, to shop, to meet a friend for lunch. What will that impact look like?

We don't want our communities to suffer. As Ontarians, I don't believe we want our neighbours to struggle. We don't want our businesses to go under. We don't want our young people to feel hopeless. We don't want our seniors hungry and destitute. We want people employed. We want people to be secure and comfortable in their golden years.

In 1965, the Canada Pension Plan was first established on a simple principle: that being a senior should not be the greatest indicator that an individual will live in

poverty. It is from that initial belief that one of our country's largest, most inclusive social programs was born, and it is because of that same principle that we are all here today discussing pensions. At the end of the day, all Ontarians, all Canadians and all people deserve the right to retire with dignity.

An hour really adds up. Okay.

Too often we are told that pension plans are a luxury or they are a thing of the past. But retirement security is not a luxury; it is a necessity. The Canada Pension Plan continues to prove that collective retirement security can be delivered in an efficient, effective and reliable manner. To this end, I would like to share a comment that was shared with me on Facebook: "I am disabled, on a disability pension from a local employer who paid me very little money and who nickels and dimes me for every bit of disability pension I receive. Retire? I want to survive. Retirement and any kind of comfort with basic needs is a dream I can't afford."

Speaker, life doesn't stop at retirement. The CPP was created on the principle that it is beneficial to all of us when our friends and our neighbours aren't struggling and can continue to contribute to the economy after they retire. Unfortunately, though, as the world has changed around us, the benefit provided by the CPP has become insufficient. The maximum yearly benefit is \$12,500, and the average senior ends up receiving less than \$7,000 a year from the Canada Pension Plan. It remains our steadfast belief, as the government maintains as well, that the ideal way to solve the retirement security crisis is through an enhancement of the CPP. It is the simplest solution for the greatest number of people, and it would permit a number of efficiencies and securities that can only be provided on a national scale.

It is too bad that our Prime Minister does not see it the same way. Like our Conservative colleagues to my right, Prime Minister Harper also believes that our retirement security crisis can be solved with voluntary savings options that fill the pockets of bankers and insurance brokers collecting hefty fees at every turn.

With CPP expansion currently off the federal table, we are left to explore other options. But I remind the government not to forget our shared belief that increasing the CPP is the ideal option. As they continue to roll out the design of the ORPP, I hope they will ensure that the plan can be easily integrated in the event of future CPP expansion, after Prime Minister Mulcair is sworn in.

The NDP supports the idea of public pensions. That's why we proposed one for Ontario in 2010. The NDP supports progressive public programs. We don't, however, and never will support Harper-style pooled retirement pension plans, or PRPPs, that put banks ahead of people. It is concerning that the government so clearly prioritized bank products and Bay Street over pensions and the financial security of workers in this province. I was under the impression that, as members of provincial Parliament, we work for the people of Ontario and not for private financial institutions. PRPPs are not part of an

Ontario retirement pension plan; they are financial products.

The government is selling the idea of an Ontario retirement pension plan to Ontarians. The comforting and progressive language we are all hearing from the government speaks to the need for stability and the ability to live with dignity into retirement.

1640

However, the marketing of the PRPP legislation is that the government is giving Ontarians voluntary options. These voluntary bank products are not part of an Ontario retirement pension plan. They are favours for banks and investment companies that, incidentally, are going to be thrilled when Ontarians start putting their money into bank coffers. I'm not saying these aren't investments, but losing an average of 20% to 30% over the life of the investment, due to fees, is not the kind of retirement security that Ontarians should be banking on.

If this government is truly committed to the idea of helping Ontarians plan for and afford their futures, if they truly believe in retirement security and stability, then they should have led with public pensions and not with their Harper-style pooled retirement pension plans that commit money and benefit to corporations and banks. As I said before, banks and big business are doing just fine and they're not planning to retire anytime soon.

There are many ways to invest money in this province. If you have money to invest, you have options—more soon with the PRPP legislation looming. There are many defined contribution or DC plans that are offered by different employers. DC plans come in many shapes and sizes. Many people are familiar with group RRSPs, as one example. Defined contribution plans are based on contributions—how much someone puts in. The benefit that is paid out at retirement is not guaranteed. It is subject to the will of the market. If the market plunges, so too does the benefit.

Defined benefit plans deliver a benefit to retirees based on a defined and guaranteed benefit. The benefit is secure and predictable. People can participate in their economic community freely when they trust what they have coming in. Defined contribution plans are insufficient in terms of providing for pensioners, and they are more costly to the system in the long term.

The shift from defined benefit to defined contribution is turning out to have been a short-sighted, corporate-driven, costly shift. DC plans are easier for employers, on the paperwork side of things, and shift the risk to employees. DC plans are tidier numbers to report to shareholders. As reports like HOOPP's Shifting Public Sector DB Plans to DC state, "If the motivation for a conversion to DC is to reduce costs, then it should be noted that shifting to DC actually increases the cost of delivering a comparable ... benefit."

Come to light, we are seeing the benefit—pardon the pun—in prioritizing DB plans over DC plans. Our hope is that the government will take counsel from those who are writing the reports and who actually, and actuarially, know about designing pensions.

In terms of design, the issue we have discussed in the greatest detail so far is the definition of a comparable plan. I'll refer back to the bill and to the basic requirements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan schedule to elaborate on this issue. In order for an employee to be considered eligible, they must meet the following criteria and any other criteria specified by the not-yet-tabled next piece of legislation:

“(1) The individual is 18 years of age or older and under 70 years of age.

“(2) The individual is employed in Ontario and their employment is eligible employment.

“(3) The individual's annual salary and wages are above the minimum threshold....

“(4) The individual is not in receipt of a retirement benefit from the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

“(5) The individual does not participate in a comparable workplace pension plan as determined under the legislation referred to in subsection 1(2) of the act.”

Let's look at number 5 again. To be eligible to contribute and benefit from this progressive and inclusive plan, the individual must not participate in “a comparable workplace pension plan.” But what is “comparable”? What will disqualify someone from benefitting from this plan?

Again, let's look back at number 5. “Comparable” will be determined under the next piece of legislation. The bad news: We don't know what “comparable” means. The good news: neither does the government—yet. I know that the government is deep in consultation with some of the leading minds in the field of pensions and retirement security. I know because we have been as well. There are so many important things to consider. It is at least reassuring that the government hasn't made any rash decisions.

While it is still up for discussion, let us explore a few more ideas to consider when we are discussing comparability. What is “comparable”? As New Democrats, we were worried that comparability might be determined on the contribution side rather than the benefit side. While we never got an answer to our repeated inquiries on this matter in question period, we were glad to read in the Liberal discussion paper and to hear from the minister that defined contribution plans, or DC plans, will not be considered comparable and therefore disqualify their members from benefitting from this Ontario pension plan.

I would like to follow that up, though, with a reminder that my question from November remains unanswered on the order paper, and while the government might suggest it has been answered, after sitting across the room from this government and developing an appreciation for their understanding of commitment, you can appreciate why I might want it in writing.

With the amount of pressure that this government will no doubt be under from the banking and insurance lobbies, I know how tempting it might be to reverse that position and do a U-turn. Defined contribution plans are

not comparable. They must not be considered as such, no matter how tightly they put the screws to you.

Another issue with comparability: It says in the schedule that a worker may not “participate in a comparable workplace pension plan.” My question is this: Are we only talking about plans or are we talking about people? Here's my point: Some might argue that, as a teacher, my plan would be considered comparable or better, and therefore disqualify me from participating. Some might argue that OMERS, a strong pension plan, would also be considered comparable. That seems to make sense from a plan-to-plan comparison standpoint. However, from a person-to-person point of view, imagine a part-time worker in an OMERS plan. That person would receive a significantly reduced amount compared with a full-time worker contributing to the same plan. That reduced amount is not sufficient to live on. So, do they deserve to be disqualified from participating in a plan that would allow them to live more securely?

Also, what about workers who have only paid into these comparable plans for a short period of time? Their pension benefit could be a pittance compared to someone else's in the same plan. I would urge the government to approach this question carefully.

This is what it looks like from here: It looks like the government is focusing on disqualifying people to re-assure the business community that fewer and fewer people will be eligible to participate. I have suggested in this Legislature that the focus be on ways to include more and more people. If the goal is to provide more security, then do it. If the goal is to grow the pot of money for the future benefit of working Ontarians, then let more people participate.

What if a potentially exempt worker wants to pay in, wants to invest in Ontario? Will there be a way to voluntarily opt in? What if a worker who is close to retirement wants to pay more now to benefit more later? Will there be a way to top up and pay more in? What if a worker is part-time or recently enrolled in their current comparable pension plan and won't receive sufficient benefit? What added security can this plan offer them?

The old adage “The more the merrier” may not be entirely appropriate, but it worked for our health care system that was once universal, proud and strong. Since, it has been reduced, undermined and chipped away at by the federal and provincial governments. It is the average individual in Ontario who is now paying the price.

There is an opportunity here. The government should not be so quick to dismiss the arguments for universality. The logistics and administrative nightmare of tracking even one individual through their career of varied employment—eligible, ineligible, comparable, not comparable—that should be factored in.

It would seem that everyone in the country, with perhaps the exception of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, supports the expansion of the CPP. So, after the next federal election, when Tom Mulcair is at the helm, we'll be looking at different options for retirement, which will be great.

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the glee from the other side at the prospect.

However, as I have said, the call from those interested in pensions is that this plan must mirror the CPP to the greatest extent possible. If it doesn't, rather than providing retirement security for more people, it might undermine the goal of expanding the CPP for all Canadians, and this can't happen.

We can see that there are tricky details to figure out, but starting at a place that is the most inclusive seems to be a good place to start. Everyone deserves the opportunity to live with dignity and security in their retirement. Perhaps the government might consider that everyone deserves the opportunity to participate and benefit in a plan that will ensure that security.

To the same end, the government needs to also consider portability. Job hopping seems to be the new norm for modern workers, and not necessarily voluntary job hopping. Trends show that the average worker tends to stay in one workplace for no more than five years. This means that as they move between workplaces, their pension needs to move with them; it needs to be portable. As new challenges arise, so do new questions, such as: How to handle workers who move in and out of the province? What will the effect be on workers who have a comparable pension who then move to a workplace that does not?

1650

I suspect the government has heard these concerns before, and I hope that they have been listening. As I've said before, we are lucky to have a breadth of expertise in this province that understands the implications of even the smallest of design features. Of course, the closer the plan is to the CPP, the less these concerns arise, and I hope the government understands that, as well.

Of the many design details that will be debated in the coming months and years, perhaps the one that requires the most delicacy is establishing the minimum earnings threshold. It is important that low-income Ontarians are given the opportunity to participate in the ORPP, but it is just as important that they can be included without being penalized through a reduction in their guaranteed income supplement or Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System benefit. Though the minimum earnings threshold is not established in this bill beyond section 5, subsection 4 states that contributions shall be determined by applying the applicable contribution rate to the portion of the eligible employee's annual salary and wages between the minimum threshold and the maximum threshold. The consultation paper released by the government in December did state that to reduce the burden on lower-income workers, earnings below a certain threshold would be exempt from contributions, similar to the CPP. I'm pleased to see that the government is taking this into account. Simply being aware of the problem, however, does not necessarily ensure a solution.

Though I understand that the consultation process the government underwent was little more than a public rela-

tions exercise, I would refer them to the written submission provided by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives entitled *Getting the Design Right on the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan*, and I would advise them that there are some pretty amazing resources available to them that they should not gloss over so quickly. I will read a portion of the "Minimum threshold" section of that report:

"Prohibiting low-income workers from participating in the ORPP, which will increase the chances of living in poverty at retirement, is not the appropriate policy solution.

"The consultation paper identifies the impacts that the ORPP can have on low-income seniors in retirement. These impacts result from high tax back rates for the guaranteed income supplement (GIS). It also provides data showing that not all low-income earners end up low-income in retirement and not all higher-income earners are high-income in retirement.

"The potential impact of the ORPP results from the design of the GIS. It is not a problem created by the ORPP. And, therefore, the design of the ORPP cannot solve the problem. The best solution is to make changes in the GIS to reduce the tax back rate.

"An Ontario solution could ensure that low-income earners would not be contributing during their working lives to a pension plan that would be taxed back from them in retirement. It could take the form of a refundable tax credit payable to low-income individuals. Employers would continue to contribute on all pensionable earnings. Low-income employees would get contributions back at tax time. An existing mechanism that could be enhanced would be the working income tax benefit.

"The biggest challenge for this recommended mechanism would be the federal/provincial financial implications. For low-income earners, the tax credit would result in the premium being paid to and credited back by Ontario and then taxed back in retirement by the federal government through the GIS. As a result, Ontario revenues would be reduced to offset the sharp tax back of a federal program. This is why a reduction in the GIS tax back rate is the preferred option."

Mr. Speaker, we can see it's a complicated problem, but fortunately there are a multitude of experts who are ready and willing to offer insight wherever needed. The important part is that the government adheres to the principle of including low-income Ontarians without adding undue burden. Budgets are stretched thin enough as it is, and the ORPP needs to work with existing programs to ensure that there is no additional penalty.

Another concern we have with the design of the ORPP is a concerning little section in the 2014 budget, and our Conservative colleagues found it too. According to the 2014 budget, in the section entitled "Unlocking Value from Government Assets," the government presents the following:

"By unlocking value from its assets and encouraging more Ontarians to save through a proposed new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, new pools of capital would be

available for Ontario-based projects such as building roads, bridges and new transit. Our strong alternative financing and procurement model, run by Infrastructure Ontario, will allow for the efficient deployment of this capital in job-creating projects.”

Picking up the phone to say, “Hey, pension management”—

Interjections.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: “Hey”—

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Hey, what?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I’m just waiting.

Picking up the phone to say, “Hey, pension management team, we misjudged the cost of our transit project,” is not an acceptable practice. Pension plans operate with the sole objective of delivering a secure retirement for their members, and this sort of language from the government leads us to believe that they are less concerned with this principle than the dozen other holes they have dug for themselves.

We want guarantees that this pension pool will be further away than arm’s length. This money is for retirement security and retirement future, not for bankrolling more dysfunctional public-private partnership boondoggles or for sinking into more scandals. This government is notorious for throwing good money after bad. This pension plan must be stronger than gold-plated; it needs to be steel-walled against political sticky fingers. Guarantee that for the people of Ontario, please. There can’t be an emergency pension fund bat phone. Those who will be qualified and chosen to manage and administer this plan must be from the pension world, not the back rooms at Queen’s Park, and their goal must be to ensure retirement security, not financing campaign promises.

Speaking of those from the pension world, I would like to acknowledge the many and mighty pension experts and enthusiasts we have been able to meet with since the election. There are some wonderful minds in this field and we are glad that they are in consultation with the government. We would encourage the government to continue to meet with design experts, actuaries, plan administrators and pensioner groups long after the ORPP has been implemented.

We’ve had the opportunity to meet with pension academics, plan administrators, labour leaders, think tanks and pensioner groups. As I said earlier, I know the government has met with a number of the same people and I hope their messages and lessons resonated. Just in case they didn’t, I would point you to the written submissions provided by the Ontario Federation of Labour, CUPE and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives as shining examples of the available expertise. All three groups have consulted extensively, combining their own knowledge with the knowledge of others and the experiences of workers across the province. In fact, I’m pleased to see Steve Staples here, the OFL’s director of research and education and assistant to the president. Welcome.

Our pension system needs strengthening in a broader capacity. As we said earlier, the ORPP is a new piece, but it does not solve the other pension plan issues.

Thank you to those we have met with and continue to learn from and work with. Also, on a personal note, I’d like to acknowledge the work of my colleague from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and our leader from Hamilton Centre, both of whom have worked diligently to advance the goal of a secure retirement for Ontarians. Also, thank you to our research team. Thanks to Ethan for everything he has invested through the years to ensure that more Ontarians retire with dignity.

But as we in this Legislature know, not everyone is on the same page. In the coming months, the government can expect to come up against massive opposition from the banking and insurance industries. But as I said before, banks and big business are doing just fine and they have no plan to retire any time soon. I imagine the government has immense pressure from the banks and insurance companies to make changes to grow their industry. We’re not interested in standing in the way of business, but we are very interested in workers and families and in the average individual who is trying to get by and hopefully get ahead.

The Bay Street lobby groups are pretty pleased that the government is rolling out the promised PRPP legislation so far ahead of any real ORPP legislation. The latter, as we see here, is little more than a shell game introduced by the government to distract Ontarians from the far more detailed private PRPP legislation that the government has tabled to appease the banks and insurance companies.

This isn’t an initiative, however, that will only impact big business. There isn’t anyone in this Legislature who will deny that a province-wide pension will have an impact on businesses. Our Conservative colleagues have said that this pension is going to be carried on the backs of the private sector. We have heard that it is business that creates wealth. We have heard from businesses that they will have to find the money somewhere to pay their ORPP contributions and will fire people, move businesses out of the country and stop donating to charities.

1700

If we’re going to speak in extremes, then I have a few to volunteer. Right now in this province the financial mistakes of this government are being carried by families across the province. Families are paying for hydro mismanagement and global debt repayment—not their debt repayment, but it’s on them. The OPSEU campaign we saw yesterday here at the doors of Queen’s Park that is asking, “What would you do with 8.2?” asks what the average person would do with \$8.2 billion in wasted money.

So, with people paying their own way and paying the government’s way out of the government’s hole, why are they now being threatened by a violent reaction from business for wanting to have secure retirements? If businesses alone create wealth, then what on earth are customers, patrons and clients for? It isn’t just people in stores that create business; it’s people spending money in stores that keeps the economic world turning.

We acknowledge a short-term impact, but what would be the impact of consumers holding onto their money because they don't have enough and can't rely on predictable income coming in? What's the impact on a business in the long term, and how many businesses fold because of an additional 1.9% versus how many businesses will fold if Ontarians are no longer able to participate in their economic community after retirement?

Why is everything here so short-sighted? Initiatives are either based on election cycles or immediate financial gains. Where is the big picture, long-term thinking that will save money in the long run? Everything is buy now and pay later. Where is the invest now, reap the benefit later? The Conservatives and business voices are saying that people aren't saving and that's their problem—that they should know better. Well, here we have a case of focus on the short-term instead of the long-term investment, and one would think that they should know better.

This plan isn't about undermining business. We're all part of an economic ecosystem. We work together. When we let it get out of whack, one part might benefit but another falters, and that isn't what's best for our communities. We have rich and dynamic business diversity in Oshawa, and I'm sure that that is true in communities across the province. I hope that more people will be able to frequent their local business establishments, appreciate their services, enjoy their products and invest in their business for many years to come. They are more likely to do it if we switch our thinking to long term and ensure that people have a predictable, steady income.

So full disclosure: I'm a fourth-generation public sector worker, I am a New Democrat and I am a staunch trade unionist. So as I'm sure people might guess, I have a set of progressive values, and pensions are right in line with my ideas about opportunities, human value and dignity. I have a hard time understanding the argument against pensions and retirement security, but here is some of what I have picked up along the way. I have heard that if people knew how to save, then they would. Related to that, I have heard that we need to teach financial literacy to address the savings crisis. I have heard that if people learn to eat well and live well, then they would have more money. I heard yesterday that we need to focus on building home equity.

I am all about education, and I remember learning in high school about compound interest and how it could work for or how it could work against you. I thought of that lesson when I was forced to live off of credit cards for a time. I fully understood the situation. But this isn't about me.

I would like to share the story of an Oshawa couple in their late twenties and their new, young daughter. As Jesse shared with our office, "For our family, savings isn't an option." Jesse and Savannah are students in Oshawa who attend Durham College and UOIT, respectively. They're also young parents of a two-and-a-half-year-old. Jesse and Savannah both work part time, volunteer in the community development sector, attend full-

time classes and try to spend every spare moment that they have with their toddler. Their income is largely subsidized by student loans, with a combined debt load of \$70,000. Savannah put her name on the waiting list for subsidized child care the day after she found out she was having a baby, about three and a half years ago. They didn't get a spot until this past September. Before they received a child care subsidy, they were spending \$200 a week on private child care for a babysitter.

After rent, utilities, food and clothing are paid for, some months they end up pulling in less than they owe. Their family income is less than \$20,000 a year, and when the temperatures drop, the increase in heating bills gobbles up any leftover disposable income.

When they can, they support their parents, too, who are also dealing with issues such as long-term disabilities and financial problems.

Saving for retirement is simply not an option. They understand all too well how to bargain-shop, cut costs and do more with less. It isn't a matter of a lack of financial literacy or hard work. Between school, volunteering and working, Jesse and Savannah are both working more than 50 hours per week.

In an economy increasingly producing short-term, part-time, precarious employment with no benefits, and the cost of education, child care, and the basic necessities of life such as food getting higher and higher, their prospects for saving for retirement are grim. That is why an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and an increased CPP is essential for the long-term financial security for working-class families. Jesse and Savannah aren't looking for a handout; they're just looking to be treated fairly in an increasingly unfair economy. They are looking for a way to get ahead. I don't know if their story is that different from others across the province.

Mr. Speaker, with how complicated the world is these days, I would say that most young people today could teach the older dogs some new tricks about stretching a dollar, creative budgeting or sacrifice. They can't imagine a time when home ownership was a possibility. They won't likely have a job for more than a few years. They can't afford tuition repayments, transit, rent and life, so they might have to stay living with their parents. These are choices other generations didn't necessarily have to make. It isn't fair to compare then and now and measure today by yesterday's yardstick; it is fair to look at now and fix it for the future.

I would challenge the Conservatives to revamp their arguments to reflect the reality facing the whole community and not just their immediate neighbours.

I am pleased to be able to stand in this proud Legislature and speak about pensions, and I thank the member opposite for the opportunity to speak today. Coming out of the public sector, specifically education, I do know the value of a pension. Pensioners know the value of a pension, and those who work and wonder how they will survive or thrive after their working years know the value of a pension.

As New Democrats, we have always and will always continue to believe that all Ontarians should have access to a strong defined benefit pension plan, and for those who don't have one, it is our duty as representatives of this province to provide it. We want Ontarians to have good pensions. A good pension is a safe, protected, low-cost vehicle not only for individuals to save money but for employers to add to that savings, and for those protected savings to grow and eventually provide benefits and financial predictability and security into retirement.

Ben Franklin is quoted as saying: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." With all due respect to Mr. Franklin, I would add to that. What I know to be certain is that life is full of surprises. Expect the unexpected. That sounds fun until you have to pay for those surprises. People know that life will happen, and if they don't have money in the bank or money coming in, they will live in dread of the next surprise that means they won't be able to pay their bills or feed themselves.

Mr. Speaker, life doesn't stop at retirement. People with a predictable income can make plans. People with a predictable income can spend some of it. People with a predictable income can live more freely and participate in their economy, whether that means seeing a movie with a friend or planning a trip. People with a predictable income won't lie awake at night dreading what the future might bring.

People still want to participate in their communities after they retire. They want to be secure. People will want to know that there is money and that they have health and wellness support as they age and improve. Hard-working Ontarians are going to retire eventually, and all of them deserve to work and retire with dignity.

So there is a lot of work to be done. We all agree on the importance of retirement security, but as we all know, the devil is in the details, so we'll look forward to seeing more of the details of this plan and we will fight to ensure that the plan is strong, progressive and available to as many Ontarians as possible. As a New Democrat, I know the value of a strong defined benefit pension, and we hope that the government does too.

Thank you very much.

1710

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Oshawa for her presentation. I know that, as the critic for this file, she is very focused on this particular issue, and I appreciate her passion for pensions. I want to thank her for coming to the first official consultation we held in Kingston. It was great to have you there and to really hear all sides of this very important issue. I want to thank the honourable member for Kingston and the Islands for hosting us. It really was a terrific debate, and it really underscores the complexity of this issue.

It is important, Speaker, as we're moving forward with this legislation, that we really consider the feedback we

have received in the consultation process, because we have been out listening to Ontarians, asking for their input as we consider the key design features of this plan. But one thing is very sure, and I think the member opposite has really spoken very well to it, and that is the value of a pension to people and ensuring that, in Ontario, we do what we can to strengthen the Ontario retirement system. That's exactly what we are doing by introducing Bill 56, with the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. It is ensuring that when people retire, they can retire with some comfort and dignity.

I do want to point out one aspect of the legislation, just to assure the member opposite that we are very concerned about the sustainability of this plan and ensuring that the benefits of this plan are for the members of the plan. It does say: "The administrative entity shall hold the contributions, and any accruals from the investments, in trust for the members and other beneficiaries of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. The contributions and the accruals shall not form part of the Consolidated Revenue Fund." That was included in this framework legislation for that reason.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I listened with great interest to the comments from the member from Oshawa. A little disturbing—I mean, we seem to take a kick at our banks every chance we get. We have the privilege, in this country, of having one of the better banking systems in the world. I look around at some of the investments people have made over the years and have suffered. People had what seemed to be successful companies, like General Motors, Air Canada—you can go through some of the companies that people trusted and thought they would last forever. That's one benefit we have with investing in our banks.

One thing that does scare our party is that we're talking about these deductions going into the coffers of our government, and this government seems to have the idea that it just continues borrowing. It looks at this money as not going into investments. It's being taken into a pool of money they can spend on infrastructure, because they can no longer borrow any more money for these projects. It concerns me, because you look at countries around the world now, like the country of Greece, which went through this. People that had pensions in Greece lost their pensions. This is not a guarantee just because the government says they're going to pay pensions in the future. If they don't spend wisely, the money won't be there.

We see examples. We look at the unrest in Greece, where they're upset with the fact that the past record of spending has meant embarrassment and lack of funds. Now they're relying on other suppliers of funding—Germany and these companies that came to bat for them—to come to bat again.

These pensions are richer than they are in these countries where they're asking for help. I think we have to wake up to the fact that there's a limit to the amount of

capital there. We're punishing private sector companies that are trying to make a go here.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to commend the member from Oshawa for a really good debate on Bill 56. It's an important bill. It's probably one of the more important things this government has proposed. I know that we proposed this back in 2010; we talked about an Ontario pension plan. So it's good that they're actually bringing it to light.

Financial security is a concern for everyone, and more and more so when our future doesn't look like people can save on their own because of the lack of job prospects that are out there because of the poor management with the deficit that we have with this government that's displayed. So it is important that people have security, and this is a step in the right direction.

I'm also questioning why three phases, but I guess we'll see how they roll out, phase by phase. It will be interesting to find out—the second phase is supposed to establish an arm's-length administrative body to handle benefit and administration and asset management. The third, I understand, is going to detail the specific design features of the plan.

What would be nice is to get some preamble to what that would look like so that the critic, who was very well educated on the subject, and perhaps the critic from the Conservatives as well, could maybe have some productive feedback now, as opposed to after the fact.

We had consultations on the pension plan. I understand the critic invited herself to Kingston. Those are public consultations. You need to be more inclusive. Regardless if you're a majority or minority, we are here to represent the constituents of our riding, and we have productive, progressive feedback. We presented the Ontario pension plan in 2010. It's not a new concept to the NDP. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is very passionate about it, so please consult with the other members on this side of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The honourable transportation minister.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to speak this afternoon on such an important issue. It's the first opportunity I've had to speak here in the Legislature since we returned after the winter break.

This is a very, very important issue. I had the chance to listen, of course, to the member from Oshawa and the member from Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry—is that right? Close enough?—and also the member from London–Fanshawe in the course of the discussion this afternoon. But of course, as well, I had the chance to listen to my colleague, the minister responsible for this particular issue.

In all of the discussion it kind of took me back to the very grand consultation that we all had with the people of Ontario last May and June. In fact, I think of my own community of Vaughan and all of the opportunities that I had, in particular to talk to the seniors in my community

who expressed their concern about what might be coming next for those who would be following in their footsteps, for their children and grandchildren. The issue of retirement security and income security into their retirement years for their kids and grandkids was particularly important to them. They were delighted to hear that we put forward, under the leadership of Premier Wynne, a plan to move forward with enhancing the situation in future years for retirement security. It was extremely disappointing for them to hear at that time that both opposition parties stood in stark contrast to us on this particular item.

I can think of no other individual other than my colleague the member from Scarborough–Guildwood, the Associate Minister of Finance responsible for this particular very important issue, who is leading province-wide consultations and who is doing an extraordinary job. I hope at some point soon this minister will have the opportunity to come to York region—to come to Vaughan, specifically—to talk to those in my community for whom this is a very, very important issue.

But it does bear repeating: We need to have the debate. We need to have the discussion, as we are here in the Legislature today, but we need to get on with moving forward with this plan. Certainly, under this minister's leadership, I know that we will deliver a strong retirement security plan—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Oshawa has two minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the thoughtful comments from my colleagues in the Legislature. That was my very first time giving a full hour lead. An hour is a long time, and my throat is on fire. Anyway, thank you very much.

Interestingly, as my colleague from London–Fanshawe pointed out, this is the first of three parts. So part of that will be the exciting opportunity to have this debate a few more times. This hour is not the first; it will be the first of three that we'll be giving on this topic, so you may hear some of these things again.

I thank the Associate Minister of Finance for her comments. I'm glad to be reassured that the money that's going into the pension is going to be kept separately in a little box that is safe. So if we can hear more about that and be guaranteed of that, it would be great.

Thank you to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. Thank you for mentioning Oshawa and GM. I'll take this opportunity to mention the fact that GM's new announcement of its investment in Ingersoll affects us in Oshawa directly, because now some of our pensioners can sleep at night knowing that their pensions are at least secure for the next stretch of time, as GM has committed to continue to do business in Canada. We're pleased to know that.

1720

Something else the member from London–Fanshawe had mentioned about the government being more inclusive: I know that they're in consultation right now with many different people. As I said before, I encourage

them to continue that process through this and certainly long after the ORPP is implemented but to be inclusive from the get-go.

The Minister of Transportation: As you said, this is your government's plan to move forward, and we look forward to it actually moving forward.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Mr. Speaker, before I start, I just want to make mention that I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague the member from Scarborough–Agincourt. I want to take this opportunity to wish her and her community a happy new year. So happy new year to her and her community.

It truly gives me great pleasure to speak on this very important bill. As much as I am pleased to be back here in the House, I do want to say that I really did enjoy my time during the recent constituency break. It gives me great pleasure when I get an opportunity to be in my community, meeting with the various organizations. I had an opportunity to visit with many of the schools in Davenport and, more importantly, meet with many of the constituents in Davenport. So a big shout-out to them. It was very nice to meet with all of you.

I'm happy to be back here and get important work done for Ontarians. I'm very happy to rise this afternoon to discuss such an important piece of legislation which will affect the way Ontarians save for their retirement in a meaningful way.

Ontario is taking an important step in helping millions of people save for their retirement by introducing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2014. The ORPP is one of the centrepieces of the 2014 budget, and this legislation puts the framework of our plan in place and provides us with the necessary tools to implement the plan by January 2017.

This legislation would help create a savings tool for the people of this province, designed to give people a secure floor they can rely on. It's an investment in our collective futures and a chance to give Ontarians the retirement security they deserve.

This legislation would, if passed, require the establishment of the ORPP by January 1, 2017, and set out the basic parameters of the plan, including equal contributions from employees and employers, capped at 1.9% each on an employee's annual earnings of up to \$90,000. It would also ensure that contributions will be invested by an organization at arm's length from the government. The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan also ensures that benefits would be indexed to inflation to provide a predictable source of retirement income for life.

It is important to understand what the implementation of this legislation means. This bill provides further detail about participation and benefits. Specifically, it would give authority to the government to request and collect information, such as personal information, for the purposes of establishing the plan. Once in place, the ORPP will give people a predictable source of retirement

income for life, something they can rely on so they can better enjoy their golden years.

An important part of the process for the implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is the process of consultations that the Associate Minister of Finance has completed. Associate Minister Hunter has engaged with people across the province to hear their views on the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

Minister Hunter has engaged extensively with stakeholders, and consistent among her conversations is agreement that people are not saving enough for retirement, a problem that has the potential to impact everyone. There was a study that was released this week by Sun Life that showed that a growing number of Canadians believe they won't be financially prepared to retire at 65.

Already, in initial conversations with businesses, labour organizations and individuals, we've heard some great feedback on how this plan should be rolled out. In fact, in the past month, two studies from the Conference Board of Canada and Manulife have reiterated that sentiment. According to a poll released by RBC recently, only 39% of respondents put money away for retirement in 2014. Further, 30% of respondents have not yet begun saving at all.

Similarly, economists, like the former governor of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, have told us that the implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will be good for the economy in the long run.

In the coming weeks, a consultation paper will be released on the key design details of the plan. The consultation paper will look at some of the key design details of the ORPP, and we'll be able to provide you with more details in the coming weeks as that is rolled out.

I'd like to now talk about the ORPP in relation to our economy and small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, small businesses are a crucial part of our province's economic growth and well-being. In my riding of Davenport, we've got many great small businesses which make our community a more vibrant and bustling place. So many neighbourhoods are tied together by dynamic small businesses, like Corso Italia, Bloor-dale, West Queen West, the Junction Triangle and Little Portugal. Walking along many of these neighbourhoods, especially over the last few weeks when we had the constit time off, it is easy to see how integrated and essential these small businesses are to our community. It's so important. Many of them are owned and run by our local residents, and they are people who dedicate their lives and are truly invested in their local community. I know that two favourites for my staff are Brock Sandwich and Holy Oak, where we get yummy sandwiches and great espressos and cappuccinos. These small businesses are vital to all communities, and I know they exist across the province.

It takes a lot of courage to start your own business. It is absolutely vital for the government to support these individuals and organizations.

The ORPP is certainly not a tax on these businesses but a vehicle to help individuals save for their retirement. It's also an investment in the long-term health of our economy.

We know that people are not saving enough for retirement. I gave you numbers just a while ago. Only 39% of respondents put away money for retirement in 2014. If this trend continues, individuals will face lower standards of living, their consumption in retirement may decrease, and they may rely more on publicly funded programs. That's not good for people, that's not good for business, and that's certainly not good for the economy.

The ORPP would help correct a problem we see emerging on the horizon. What David Dodge has told us is that the long-term benefits will outweigh the short-term costs. That's good for all businesses, including small businesses.

Employees who feel more secure about their futures tend to be more productive. More than that, we know that businesses care about the well-being of the people who work for them. The ORPP would be a cost-effective way of helping give workers the secure retirement floor they can rely on so that all of us can rest assured about our collective futures.

It is also important to remember that the ORPP isn't being introduced in isolation. Our government is continuing to work to balance the budget and offer assistance to our province's small businesses. We know that the cost and administrative burden of some workplace pension plans can make it difficult for many small employers to provide them to employees. What the ORPP could do is allow these employers to compete with larger employers for talent and retention by being able to offer employees a retirement benefit program.

To help businesses adjust, the ORPP would be implemented in 2017 to coincide with the expected reductions in employment insurance premiums. In addition, enrolment would occur in stages, beginning with the largest employers, and contributions would be phased in over two years.

Our government's commitment to balancing the budget would not be impacted by the implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. While it is true that the ORPP would require additional contributions from all affected employers, including those funded by the government, improving retirement income security is important to future retirees and for the future prosperity of the province. In other words, higher savings today would mean greater incomes and consumption in the future, improving job and economic growth in the long term. More retirement savings now would also mean more capital being available for investment, which, in turn, would increase productivity and improve economic growth and job creation.

1730

The ORPP would address the under-saving challenge and would expand pension coverage in Ontario at a time when workplace pension coverage is low, and oftentimes non-existent.

The ORPP would reduce the potential savings gap many workers face in retirement, across the province and in my riding of Davenport.

I'm happy I could speak on this very important piece of legislation, which, if passed, will take important steps to help Ontarians save for their retirement and enjoy their golden years. Many seniors in my riding of Davenport met with me to explain how they are struggling to make ends meet. This is clearly due to insufficient retirement savings.

This is about balancing the needs of today's workforce against the needs of an aging population. The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is about securing our collective futures so we can all rest assured. That's why we're taking action now to ensure a strong economy for the future.

Once again, I'm happy to be back in the House and I look forward to getting important work done, not only for my constituents in Davenport but across this great province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to follow my colleague from Davenport, and thank you for the best wishes for my coming new year, starting tonight. As all of us celebrate the lunar new year, I want to wish everybody a happy new year. Gong Hay Fat Choy.

I'm very pleased to see my colleague the associate minister, who was present here today throughout the debate on Bill 56. I also want to say that the debate on Bill 56 tonight is very timely, because all of us right now are talking about the RSP season. I know everybody in this House is talking about it with their children and with their family, how you're going to contribute in a very short time. So it's very appropriate, as the government right now, to debate this particular bill, because we know—you heard the statistics this afternoon, Mr. Speaker—how many Ontarians are not saving appropriately for their retirement.

My colleague earlier talked about the different studies being presented. I want to share with the audience today who are watching that there are many reasons why people are not contributing to their pension plan. The workplace pension plan is very low and getting lower. Two thirds of Ontarians don't have a workplace pension plan, and that's a concern. We know that voluntary savings vehicles are not enough. The word "voluntary" means that you have a choice.

In 2012, there was \$280 billion in unused RRSP room in Ontario. That's a lot of billion dollars unused out there. At the same time, the CPP is not enough to live on. In 2012, the average benefit paid by the CPP was only \$6,800. As a member from the Toronto area, this is an unacceptable amount. You cannot even pay your rent, let alone have a healthy, balanced cost of living.

Together this means that a growing number of Ontarians, especially in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt, are aging and at risk of facing declining standards of living as they retire. This threatens both the

economy as well as consumption, because seniors do actually contribute to the economy. That's a concern for me in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt. We heard today from my colleague opposite in the third party as well as my colleague here from Davenport: That's not good for the economy, and it's definitely not good for retired seniors.

This proposed legislation, if passed, would create a savings tool for people in this province designed to give them more security as they retire.

I want to share with the members in the House but also with those who are watching today that in the proposed legislation, in the preamble—I want to thank the associate minister for this—it states very, very clearly: “The government of Ontario is taking a leadership role in addressing this pressing issue by proposing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, a new mandatory provincial pension plan that would enable Ontario workers to build a more secure retirement future. It would be the first of its kind in Canada and would build on key features of the Canada Pension Plan.”

If the federal government had demonstrated leadership and co-operation working with our government, we would not be here presenting and debating Bill 56. We know the government and the Premier have reached over to ask to work with the federal government. There was no extended olive branch on this piece.

In the preamble it is very clearly stated: “The government of Ontario is committed to ensuring that the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is administered by an entity with a strong governance structure and investment strategy to ensure that the plan is efficiently managed, accountable, transparent and fair.”

Mr. Speaker, during the last couple of weeks I was travelling with the finance committee, as you know, across Ontario to hear about the pre-budget consultations. We heard a presentation about this particular bill and support for the bill. I also want to remind the viewers, as well as those opposition members, that this is not a tax. I know some of the opposition members believe this is a tax. That is absolutely not true. The ORPP is a vehicle to help individuals—Ontarians—save for their retirement. It is an investment in the long-term health of our economy and making sure seniors are retiring with adequate income and, at the same time, that they have security.

The other piece here I want to share with members of the House about this particular proposed legislation and the ORPP is that we are going to be using the existing infrastructures, where possible, to ensure more cost-effective implementation of the ORPP. In particular, we will be leveraging the expertise from the Ontario public sector pension plan and our strong financial services sector. As all of us know, Ontario is the engine when it comes to financial security and the financial sector. We will be working with the federal government, even though they are refusing to work with us, when necessary, to ensure there's a seamless delivery of this plan for Ontarians as well as businesses.

As I said earlier, the preamble of the proposed legislation, Bill 56, is about the arm's-length relationship and the governance structure. It's very, very important that Ontarians know the proposed ORPP contributions will be managed by an independent body that has an arm's-length relationship with the government. This strong governance model would be put in place for managing investments associated with the annual contribution, like we're doing now very shortly. Ontarians and Canadians across the country will be contributing to their RRSPs, and this is no different than what we would be doing in the future.

In addition, we will be considering leveraging Ontario's strong financial services sector and Ontario's proposed new asset pooling entity in the administration of the plan and investment management. Again, like I said before, we are reaching out to the federal government and hopefully they are listening because at the end of the day we're not competing with them; we want to work with them to create a secure Ontario.

I know the associate minister has already completed most of the consultation about this particular bill. We have heard feedback in terms of how to improve the bill, but heard from Ontarians—heard it very clear—that we need this kind of pension plan to support their retirement.

We also solicited expertise from the former CEO of OMERS, Michael Nobrega, in his role as the implementation lead, in terms of providing guidance and support in implementing the ORPP, because we know he has the expertise. He knows how to deal with the administration of this particular fund. Most importantly, he will provide the guidance and support for the government as we move into 2017. I know the associate minister is working very hard to ensure this particular bill carries through.

I also want to thank the third party. I heard the comments from my colleague from Oshawa as a new member. She was very eloquent in her presentation for 60 minutes on this particular Bill 56. I know the third party is very supportive of Bill 56. More importantly, they also recognize that their members, like our members, are supportive of Bill 56 because at the end of the day we have seniors in all ridings of the province and they are asking us to ensure their retirement years are secure, but, most importantly, that they have some tools and support from the government.

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In the final minute, I want to say to the official opposition party—I know they consistently use the words, “This is a tax,” etc. That is absolutely not accurate. We know Ontarians are not saving. At the end of the day, it is leadership by this Premier, by our government, bringing forward this proposed legislation.

It is clearly written in our bill and also in our throne speech. It is also in the 2014 budget. I would encourage everyone to take this opportunity to read the bill thoroughly.

I was encouraged by the comments I heard this afternoon from the third party. I'm also looking forward to hearing my colleague from the official opposition party.

He and I travelled, in the last couple of weeks, with the finance committee. I know he has seniors in his riding. They, too, are looking for security from the government. They, too, expect the government to lead on this particular issue.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Yes, I do have seniors in my riding. Sadly, this has absolutely nothing to do with them because it will be 40 years before anybody does see any limited benefit from this. I appreciate her bringing up the seniors. This pension tax will not help the seniors today. I must correct her.

In fact, it's also important to remind that with this pension tax, there is no government money in it. This is money from employees; this is money from employers. It's an awful misunderstanding if people think that there is any government money. This is strictly a pension tax.

I must say to the member that she must have gone to different pre-budget consultation meetings than I went to, because I heard loudly and clearly from the Ontario hotel and restaurant association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce—and the list goes on and on and on of companies who stood in front of us and talked about how this pension tax is going to cripple business and ruin the economy of Ontario. That is really the tone and tenor of the meetings that I attended, which I think were the same meetings that she attended.

We had Professor Ian Lee from the Sprott School of Business discuss what this will do to the economy and how it will affect low-income earners, as well. I'll be talking more about that in the next 20 minutes that I have.

On this pension tax, I am going to disclose much of the information from the people who did indeed present to the pre-budget consultations, and I'll be doing that in the next couple of minutes.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Davenport and the member from Scarborough–Agincourt in their summation of the ORPP.

It is interesting. The Auditor General has said that the level of underfunding of pension plans has gotten steadily worse over the past decade, so this does appear to be a response to some of those long-standing criticisms of the Auditor General for not having a very progressive plan. It's great that the government has come forward with an idea to plan for the long term and that you've listened to the Auditor General.

Where we have some concerns, though, and this will be a long-standing issue, is that there's a categorization that you're going to unlock the value from these assets to invest in Ontario-based infrastructure projects. To use this fund to fund infrastructure—you can see why we have some trust issues on this. The Auditor General, who you listened to on pension development, has also said that you need to rethink public-private partnerships, to

the tune of \$8.2 billion. We have a concern with that, because you wouldn't be looking for other revenue streams like the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan if you actually did a thorough review of the P3 mechanism, which you are apparently quite enamoured with. The Auditor General? Not so much. Us? Not so much. We see \$8.2 billion as being a substantial amount of money which could actually go to a number of issues that Ontarians are facing today, which we heard about in the finance committee as we travelled around the province—around poverty reduction, around the high cost of energy. Obviously, when you do invest in infrastructure you create jobs, so there is a cycle here that is concerning to us.

We agree; pension security is an important issue. It's a long-standing principle of ours. We look forward to making this piece of legislation stronger, but we have some outstanding concerns, which we will bring to the fore.

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

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Merci, monsieur le Président. J'ai le plaisir maintenant d'adresser ce projet de loi, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2014. I must say, Speaker, it's a particular pleasure to speak while you're officiating today. As you'll note, page Ishani, who is seated next to you, will tell you about some of her own neighbourhood in Etobicoke North.

In my community, for individuals who are looking at this legislation and some of its parameters and some of the initiatives, I think it's going to be very, very welcome there, because we know, as my honourable colleagues from Davenport and Scarborough–Agincourt have mentioned, there is a substantial underfunding, both personal as well as public, with regard to pension savings.

I might add, perhaps following from my honourable colleague from Scarborough–Agincourt, a nurse, and as an MD myself, that one of the great successes of medical and public health care over the last 100 years is the increase of life expectancy. Speaker, as you may know, if you were born in Canada in 1900, as a male, life expectancy was about maybe 47 to 52 years of age. If you're born today, it's something on the order of about 83 years and growing. Of course, for women, it's even higher.

We are at this most interesting stage where we are outliving our savings—and by the way, outliving other things too, including the calcium of our bones and all the rest of it—but we, as a government, have to take initiatives and steps to address that. That's why we're very pleased to have the Honourable Mitzie Hunter as our Associate Minister of Finance, who has been given charge of this mandate of the ORPP Act.

I would urge my colleagues opposite, even the Tories, to please support this particular act.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's my pleasure to address the comments by the members from Davenport and Scarborough–Agincourt on their speeches today in the House. We differ on this.

You know what I find strange about the government over there? When Jack Mintz came out with papers that were supportive of something the government was doing, my God, they couldn't say his name often enough. It was Jack Mintz, Jack Mintz, Jack Mintz over and over and over again. But on this pension plan, I haven't heard them mention Jack Mintz.

Jack Mintz is a world-renowned economist, as you know. But he thinks this pension plan is a lot of hooey because, first of all, they haven't defined anything about who is going to be exempt from this. But if you are a member of this plan, you've got to pay into it for 40 years to collect—if you're making \$90,000 a year, you're going to have to pay 40 years to collect \$12,000 a year.

Now, I'm not going to be in the plan, so I guess it doesn't matter to me. But it does matter to a lot of people I know, like my kids and my grandkids, who haven't started working yet, but when they do—well, who knows what Ontario is going to look like if these people are still in charge when my grandkids are looking for a job? But with this plan, as Jack Mintz said, you've got it all wrong. You're taking money out of the pockets of individual workers and you're taking money away from employers, and you're taking it to finance your pet projects. What are you going to do with that money?

We don't trust this government when it comes to that money. They're going to take that fund and they're going to spend it on Liberal pet projects—that's not going to be protected. We know that, and the people of Ontario know that, and it's time for you to come clean.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough–Agincourt has two minutes to reply to those lovely comments.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to wrap up this particular section of the debate. I want to thank the members from Davenport, Nipissing, Kitchener–Waterloo, Etobicoke North and Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke.

I am going to take from the good doctor from Etobicoke North because we know we have the facts. To the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: I'm very sorry. We deliver facts. We're based on evidence, okay? The evidence tells us very clearly that Ontarians are living longer, and the data shows that many of them are outliving their savings. So that's what the evidence is.

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So please do not do the fearmongering, and tell the truth. Because we know facts. This is evidence-based. We have evidence that shows—former bank governor Dodge talked about this issue. People are not saving. This is good for the economy. It is making sure people retire with security. We have seen in our communities how many seniors are living off food banks and, more importantly, depending on others for everyday living.

At the end of the day, yes, to this member opposite, it may not be applying to you. We're talking about the

future. We're talking about a future with security. That's what leadership is about.

More importantly, we have publicly stated our intent, both in our throne speech and in the 2014 budget. It is pretty explicit, the entire bill by the associate minister, and it clearly lays out what we plan to do in terms of administration.

So please be accurate with the information and be accurate in terms of sharing that information.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, let me give you some facts. I know I've only got what looks like nine minutes now—robbed of my 20 minutes today.

Let's talk a little bit about who's been weighing in on this. We'll start with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce says, "To this point, we're not really convinced that the ORPP is the best solution for the so-called retirement income challenge.... Mainly, the chamber and our members have been worried about the potential negative impacts of the ORPP on the business climate." We'll get to some of those impacts in the last minute. "We're convinced that the ORPP shouldn't go ahead. We really want to see the government come out with an economic impact analysis of how the ORPP will impact Ontario's economy." This is the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They also go on to say, "Many businesses are worried about the costs it will impose." As it moves forward towards implementing this new pension plan, "the government must conduct and publish an economic analysis" of the business.

Why is the chamber of commerce so worried, Speaker? I can tell you, their brand new Emerging Stronger 2015 document came out last week, which was obviously quite a shock to most people in Ontario and especially the Liberal government.

In 2012, when asked, "Do you believe the Ontario economy is going in the right or wrong direction?" Some 41% agreed it was going in the right direction. Last year, 42%—it grew a per cent—believed the economy was heading in the right direction. But last week, 29%—the number has plummeted—believed the economy is headed in the right direction.

When they talk about "How confident are you in your organization's economic outlook?"—again, two years ago, it was 72%, it grew to 74%, and it plummeted to 58%.

"How confident are you in the Ontario economy right now?" From 44% to 48%—tumbled to 29%. In every single one of the metrics, the confidence of Ontario businesses has tumbled based on the fact that this government is talking about introducing an ORPP and a carbon tax.

Let's go to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan: "Do you support the implementation?" The percentage: 86% of Ontario businesses in the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said no. "If implemented, what impact would paying additional ORPP premiums have on your business?" Sixty-nine per cent

said that they would freeze or cut salaries; 53% said they would reduce the number of employees; and 52% said they would reduce investments in their business.

This analysis tells us exactly what the business community is thinking about. They're talking about cutting people. I can tell you that it's not just the business community that's talking about cutting people. It's our own Liberal government. In the Confidential Advice to Cabinet, under the "not recommended" category, any increase in taxes would have negative, long-run, macro-economic impacts on the GDP and employment. In fact, their own Liberal document, the Confidential Advice to Cabinet, says that payroll taxes would have the "largest negative impact" on employment. They go a little farther to say, "Give us the economic impact of raising \$2 billion annually by this payroll tax." They talk about it costing 18,000 jobs for every \$2 billion. So if this is a \$6-billion program it would cost us 54,000 jobs. In fact, if you look at the long-term behavioural impact, it states here, "lower business investment, relocation of business to other jurisdictions, reduced work effort, out-migration of people." That is what the Ministry of Finance's own document said will happen.

Jack Mintz does bring an interesting perspective that you talked about. This is what he presented to the pre-budget consultation committee that the member from Agincourt was talking about—here's a quote from Ian Lee from Carleton University: "The final point I want to make is why it doesn't address low-income Canadians. Every person below the poverty line—the 20% of elders below the poverty line are getting the guaranteed income supplement" today. "It will be clawed back \$1 for \$1 from every future Ontario pension plan dollar they get. In other words, you are not going to be benefiting the low-income seniors because they will not get one ... new dollar." For every dollar you tax them in their youth, they get a dollar clawed back from their guaranteed income supplement.

We've got Jack Mintz's comments as well, where he says, "The best research has been done by Statistics Canada and McKinsey with large surveys...." They are saying that a scalpel is needed, not a sledgehammer.

So let me conclude, Speaker, in the moments that I have. Basically, if the issue is, as the McKinsey and Co. study that just came out last Thursday stated, 83% of Canadians are on track to maintain their standard of living, then let's have a program that focuses on the 17% as opposed to imposing a burden on the whole of our economy. If this group needs help, then let's help. But let's not use a sledgehammer to squash an ant. That is exactly what's happening to punish the 83% to fix the 17%. When you look at the McKinsey study—I'll read you that final point. McKinsey and Co. came out just last week and said that "the findings suggest many people are worrying needlessly." A vast majority of Canadians are saving enough for retirement.

Again, if we've got 83% who are, let's fix it for the 17% rather than dragging down our entire economy. Our entire economy is in jeopardy. The Ministry of Finance's own documents tell us that the entire economy is in jeopardy with losing 18,000 jobs for every \$2 billion you take out of the economy. This is something that is almost cataclysmic to the business community, when you've got 89% of the business community not wanting this tax.

Anecdotally, when we were on our tour of the pre-budget consultations, I can tell you that a business owner in London with 15 employees said, "Basically, I'm going to fire one of my employees and use that salary to pay the other 14." That's exactly what the Ministry of Finance heard as well.

I thank you for my time, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. It being 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Bas Balkissoon, Chris Ballard
Grant Crack, Han Dong
Cindy Forster, Michael Harris
Randy Hillier, Sophie Kiwala
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Peter Z. Milczyn
Laura Albanese, Yvan Baker
Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Ann Hoggarth, Monte McNaughton
Peter Z. Milczyn, Daiene Vernile
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
Mike Colle, Grant Crack
Joe Dickson, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Sophie Kiwala
Eleanor McMahon, Lisa M. Thompson
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Cristina Martins
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Wayne Gates, Marie-France Lalonde
Harinder Malhi, Cristina Martins
Jim McDonnell, Randy Pettapiece
Lou Rinaldi
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Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
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Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qadri
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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Granville Anderson, Bas Balkissoon
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Garfield Dunlop, Eleanor McMahon
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Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Julia Munro, Arthur Potts
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Présidente: Indira Naidoo-Harris
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Kathryn McGarry
Robert Bailey, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Jennifer K. French, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Kathryn McGarry
Indira Naidoo-Harris, Daiene Vernile
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Granville Anderson, Vic Dhillon
Christine Elliott, France Gélinas
Marie-France Lalonde, Amrit Mangat
Gila Martow, Kathryn McGarry
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment /
Comité spécial de la violence et du harcèlement à caractère sexuel**

Chair / Présidente: Daiene Vernile
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Han Dong, Randy Hillier
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
Kathryn McGarry, Eleanor McMahon
Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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