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Thursday 19 February 2015

Jeudi 19 février 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 19 February 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 19 février 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TRANSPORTATION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT (MAKING ONTARIO'S ROADS SAFER), 2015 LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE TRANSPORT (ACCROÎTRE LA SÉCURITÉ ROUTIÈRE EN ONTARIO)

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

Bill 31, An Act to amend the Highway 407 East Act, 2012 and the Highway Traffic Act in respect of various matters and to make a consequential amendment to the Provincial Offences Act / Projet de loi 31, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2012 sur l'autoroute 407 Est et le Code de la route en ce qui concerne diverses questions et apportant une modification corrélatrice à la Loi sur les infractions provinciales.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When this item of business was last debated, the member from Ottawa–Orléans had the floor with six minutes and 15 seconds remaining. She also indicated that she would be sharing her time with the member from Ottawa South.

The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the member from Ottawa–Orléans for sharing her time with me.

It's a pleasure to speak today to Bill 31, and I'd like to congratulate the minister for bringing forward this bill. It's a very important bill that deals with public safety.

In this bill we have a number of measures to deal with truck and bus safety, pedestrian safety, cycling safety, distracted driving, impaired driving and driving with medical conditions. So as legislators, this is a bill that's very important and central to our key role in representing the people who elected us, which is public safety. Our key role is to ensure that the public are safe, and in listening to the debate yesterday—or the day before, I believe—all members in this Legislature understand how central and key that responsibility is.

I'd like to pick up on a few of the remarks made by the member from Ottawa–Orléans. I think she said—she mentioned to me yesterday as well—that a car is like a

weapon, in a sense. You're driving around a tonne—2,500 pounds—of metal at fairly high rates of speed at times, and even at a low rate of speed you can do a lot of damage. I think the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke gave a description the other day of two cars coming at each other at 90 kilometres an hour and the kind of force that would be felt when they collide.

Operating a motor vehicle is a very serious responsibility. I read an interesting fact: Fatalities caused by distracted driving may exceed fatalities caused by impaired driving as early as next year, which is a pretty sobering thought. And in listening to the debate yesterday, many of the members spoke about distracted driving, highlighting something they were very concerned about. So I would like to speak a little bit about distracted driving.

But first I would like to go back to how we view impaired driving in our society. Right now, when you talk about impaired driving or a conviction for impaired driving—I think the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke described it as people being shunned. I'm not quite sure if it's that far, but there certainly is a stigma attached to it; it's a very serious social transgression to drink and drive.

At one point, though, drinking and driving was socially acceptable. It's hard to believe now, but it was. It was something that was commonplace. There were a lot of tragic consequences to that. So how did we get to the point in our society where we don't accept that anymore? Well, we educated people. We educated people, through organizations like MADD, through our police services like the OPP and local services, about the tragic personal consequences of impaired driving. The other thing we did was that we took impaired driving and made the penalties commensurate with the risk to public safety. We said to ourselves, "This is no longer acceptable. We have to apply penalties that are commensurate with the risk." Even in this bill, actually, we take some further measures.

I believe that we need to take the same approach with distracted driving. I know that in my city of Ottawa there's a public education campaign, "Leave the Phone Alone"—no texting. It's been effective. They've done a fair amount of enforcement.

In this bill, we have increased penalties by increasing the fines to a range of \$300 to \$1,000, by adding three demerit points for distracted driving through legislation, and applying that to the novice licence in the graduated licensing system.

I would like to mention as well that the member from Scarborough–Rouge River put forward a bill, the Manor-

anjana Kanagasabapathy Act, which was a bill that came out of a very tragic incident that occurred in his riding. I'd like to thank him very much for putting that forward. It's included in this bill, and I really believe it's a very important part of this bill.

We were talking about these things yesterday. It's not just BlackBerrys and Apples and any kind of device that you can text on. It is, as the member opposite—

Interjections.

Mr. John Fraser: There's distracted debating that we have right now. Thank you very much. I appreciate your input, as always.

It is different things: People eating, combing their hair, putting their makeup on. What is interesting about these things is that often you'll see people on them everywhere—when they're having lunch with each other, when they're in meetings, sometimes when they're in debate. But it has very tragic consequences. So we have to underline the social consequences of not paying attention to the road.

Again, I'm in favour of this bill. I think there are a number of good measures here. There are lots of great things to debate. But I would like to add my voice to those who have already spoken in the Legislature, to say that the measures here for distracted driving are important and we should move forward with them. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: Unfortunately, I missed the beginning of what the member from Ottawa South was saying, because I had to wait—I stay at my sister's house when I have to be here early in the morning, because she's downtown and the commute from Thornhill is too long. I would appeal to everybody to think about what we're doing to our own colleagues and friends and neighbours with this worsening traffic gridlock all the time. It took us three or four lights to get through at Harbord, to get to Wellesley and Queen's Park.

There was a lineup of cars in the bike lane, and I noticed in the cab—Ali from Beck Taxi was the cab driver—that he had "Stop and look for bikes" stickers on his windows, so that people should look before they open the doors, which is part of what we're talking about with this bill: to be a little more careful, when you open your door, not to hurt any cyclists. There's a lot that we could be doing downtown in the GTA and Hamilton to make the roads safer for cyclists, to make the roads safer for pedestrians and to make traffic move so that business and the economy can get booming again. I think that we should focus on the things that we can do easily.

0910

I think distracted driving—obviously there have to be fines and we have to be concerned, but I think it's more of a public awareness campaign. It's more of an understanding of people's behaviour. The society that we live in now is so much technology, so much going on up to the minute, so many people, their lives and their jobs—they can't function. Maybe we have to have a public

awareness campaign for employers who would consider not promoting somebody or, worse, would consider firing somebody if they couldn't get them to respond immediately, to answer an e-mail or a text message immediately.

People aren't always doing it just to play games or to set up a date or a social event. They are often under incredible pressure from their jobs. I think all of us here are aware of that, where we've gone somewhere and there's been an important message—

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I first of all want to say that I represent a part of the province where you probably can't text and you probably don't have a road. Many places where I come from unfortunately are land-locked communities where there isn't that type of technology. I say that not to make fun of it, but just to get people to recognize that, depending on where you live in this province, the issues are very different.

There, it would be nice just to have cell service. For example, in the towns of Moosonee and Moose Factory you can't get your cellphone to work because the network that they've got there is not compatible with anybody else, like Bell or Rogers or whoever. So to be able to have a cellphone and live in Moosonee or Moose Factory is a challenge.

Places like Attawapiskat, interestingly enough—and I give the government some credit; they've actually helped with some NOHFC funding in order to put a cell tower up in Attawapiskat. And we have a cell service in Attawapiskat, but guess what? It doesn't work with anybody else's cellphone, except if you happen to be connected to the cell service that runs out of Thunder Bay. So I just say, there's a very different reality for people in this province, depending on where they live.

The general intent of making sure that people do the responsible thing behind the wheel—the minister talked about the car as a weapon. He's perfectly right. There's far too much distracted driving. Everything from eating cheeseburgers to doing your hair to texting on the phone while driving is, quite frankly, taking a pretty irresponsible approach to what driving is.

I'll pick up on the point that was just made, that a lot of this stuff is, I would say, common sense, and a large part of it should be actually done through public awareness and advertising on the part of the government. I'm not so sure that, at the end of the day, we're going to have the kind of effect we want coming out of this legislation. I think it's good that we talk about it and that we try to find some way to address the issue, but I think the larger thing we've got to do is to break the culture. Once you've broken the culture I think you're probably going to be further ahead.

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

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you to my colleagues from Ottawa South, from Thornhill and from Timmins—James Bay for speaking in support of Bill 31.

As we know here on this side, for the last 13 years Ontario consistently remains ranked as either first or sec-

ond for road safety in North America. But people are still being killed on our roads. That's precisely why we need to do more. Bill 31 I think goes a long way in addressing a lot of the issues that we have here.

It's interesting that I hear support on all sides of the House, because all of us have either been involved in or have family that have been involved in a cycling or car or pedestrian accident. So I really am thrilled to hear some of these things coming forward.

Keeping our roads safe is the highest priority on the government side here, and I think that many have talked about distracted driving, which is kind of a new phenomenon. You know, 20 years ago we didn't have cellphones, we didn't have the types of electronic devices that take our eyes off the road. In today's society we have to get that message.

Certainly, our young folks are. I have two boys right now who are doing their driving courses, and they're being taught each and every time they're in the car that their cellphones are firmly either in the trunk or out of sight. I think that that goes a long way to providing support for our own distracted-driving clause.

According to recent statistics, over 45 per cent of drivers killed in Ontario are found to have drugs in their system, and I do believe that I've heard support across the House regarding our drug-impaired driving laws that we're looking at bringing forward in this bill.

Thanks very much, everybody, for the support on this bill. I look forward to further debate.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise to make comments on the act to amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Highway 407 East Act, which affects a lot of pieces of legislation, and about distracted driving and making our roads safer.

The member from Ottawa South had his remaining few minutes, which I listened to diligently, about concerns. This is about making safety better for motorists. I see the Highway 407 East Act—I certainly just want to put a plug in there: The 407 east to Highways 35 and 115 can't come soon enough. The government changed the dates a few times on that, kind of disappointing many of my residents, but we're supposed to have it there by 2020. We welcome that to open up the area of Kawartha Lakes and Haliburton. It's a big impact on our area, and we have many businesses waiting for that to happen.

Highway 35—of course, we've asked for four-laning. It's been in process and everything is kind of at the table. Again, it's kind of political will, so we encourage that to be done as soon as possible.

There were lots of comments on distracted driving, which will certainly have penalties. We've all seen the commercials. I think there are more commercials now about ways to try to encourage people to stop—very vivid commercials.

I also want to mention something in my office: the MTO's suspending licences. Sometimes licences are suspended by the MTO for medical reasons. The problem is

that some of them aren't accurate. The frustration we have a lot in my constituency office, for sure, is that the person may not even know their licence has been suspended because the mail doesn't get there for, like, 10 days. The other part is that it's 30- to 50-some days before it's actually reviewed, and that is just too long for a person to not be able to go to work and to need rides to medical appointments. I think that really needs to be looked at.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I return to the member for Ottawa South. You have two minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to thank the members from Thornhill, Timmins–James Bay, Cambridge and Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

I'd like to respond to the member from Thornhill that I do agree that the measures in this bill with regard to cycling are very important as well: the issue of public awareness and making sure that people know it's not just about the penalties; it's about social change. I thank her very much for her remarks.

To the member from Timmins–James Bay, I appreciate very much his comments on things that are important to his community and that he raised those in the debate. Again, I agree with the need to have public awareness campaigns. Penalties are just not enough. It's too late by the time there's a penalty. I'm encouraged by this bill. I think we can make some progress in terms of ending or reducing distracted driving. I thank him very much for his comments.

To the member from Cambridge, I very much appreciated your comments on distracted driving, and I fully agree with the penalties being extended to drug-related offences, driving while you're drug-impaired—the measures in the bill. That's very important as well. I'm sure that all the members in the Legislature agree with extending those prohibitions.

To the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, thank you very much for your comments on behalf of your community and what's important to you there. I do agree that the medical suspensions from MTO are things that many of our constituency offices deal with. There are some measures in this bill to improve that and make it a more transparent process. I'm encouraged by that as well, and I thank you very much for your remarks.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I thank everyone for their comments.

Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased and privileged to have the honour to speak in this House this morning in response to the government's Bill 31, An Act to amend the Highway 407 East Act, 2012 and the Highway Traffic Act in respect of various matters and to make a consequential amendment to the Provincial Offences Act.

0920

Bill 31 was introduced in this House last fall, on October 21, and now we're engaged, of course, in second reading. There has been considerable second reading debate so far, and as a result, those of us who are speaking

have about 10 minutes to speak to this bill. So there isn't a great deal of opportunity.

I think that the people from my riding of Wellington-Halton Hills, whom I'm privileged to serve—and I want to express my appreciation again for the trust that they've given me over recent years to serve in this place—would wonder, perhaps, about the priorities of the debate today. Reading the newspaper and following question period, there are no fewer than three OPP investigations under way, investigating the activities of the government with respect to Ornge air ambulance, the cancellation of the gas plants and the resulting deletion of emails, and of course, more recently, what went on leading up to the Sudbury by-election, all of which are pretty significant issues. We'll be discussing those, I'm sure, during question period, in a short time.

At the same time, I think it's important to remind members of the fiscal context in which this debate occurs today. I take my numbers from the fall economic statement that the government released before Christmas, the Ontario economic outlook and fiscal review. We see that the government is currently projecting a \$12.5-billion deficit in the current fiscal year, which ends March 31 of this year. The government claims to be working toward a balanced budget by 2017-18, and at the same time the deficit went up year over year from \$10.5 billion last year to \$12.5 billion this year. We see that the projected provincial net debt is going to be \$287.3 billion this year—not as high as Greece, but getting there. We see that the net debt in 2003 was \$139 billion, so over a period of about 11 years, it has doubled.

We see that provincial government spending this year is projected to be \$130.2 billion, which is up from \$126.4 billion last year. Again, this is a government that purports to be working towards a balanced budget, moving to a balanced budget, and yet spending went up by almost \$4 billion last year. We see that the net debt per capita, meaning the amount of money that each Ontario resident—man, woman and child—would owe, if indeed we were ever to try to pay down the debt, is \$21,003, up from \$11,339 in 2003—again, virtually a doubling of the net debt per capita since this government took office.

Then, of course, the projected interest payment on the debt this year being \$10.8 billion—I see the member has a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On a point of order, Speaker: I appreciate the member's narrative. He's a very experienced parliamentarian. Although I cannot quarrel with what he's saying, I do have to ask the Speaker, what does this has to do with the bill that's under discussion?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member if he would tie it into the bill as quickly as he can.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Bill 31 is an important bill that the government has brought forward in the Legislature. We're debating it today. I'm simply outlining the fiscal context in which we debate this legislation today. I'm

glad that the member didn't dispute the numbers. Of course, the numbers are factually correct, and they are in the fall economic statement. These are certainly the government's own numbers. Again, I think that it's important to point out the fiscal context in which we come into this House today and discuss these issues.

I'll just conclude, in deference to the member: Interest payments on the debt this year are projected to be \$10.8 billion. The interest on the debt is the fastest-growing item in the provincial budget; by 2017-18, it's expected to be \$13.9 billion. Of course, money that we pay to our lenders on the debt, in terms of interest, is money that can't go to front-line services like improving highway safety.

I'll come back now to the bill. Bill 31, of course, is an important piece of legislation that the government has introduced. We know that, in summary, the bill removes the requirement that the registrar of motor vehicles give a person who has failed to pay a toll, and subsequent fees and interest, a second notice. At the next opportunity, a vehicle permit won't be validated or issued to that person, so they're not requiring a second notification, if this bill is passed.

This bill will remove the requirement that the Minister of Transportation conduct an annual review, including public consultation, on the amount of the toll the following year with respect to the 407.

Again, we recall that back in the heady days of the new Liberal government in 2003, when they were first elected, they'd been elected, I believe, on a platform and commitment to reduce the tolls on the 407, even though I think they knew it was impossible to do that. There was a legal challenge and a court case, and in the end it was found that the government didn't have the power to reduce the tolls and couldn't do it. So, of course, they brought in this requirement for an annual review and public consultation on the tolls, and apparently they've decided that that is no longer necessary.

There are provisions in this bill with respect to distracted driving. I think we would all agree, Mr. Speaker, that more needs to be done to discourage distracted driving in the province of Ontario. With this bill, the penalties for using hand-held devices—in other words, cellphones, BlackBerrys, iPhones, whatever—while driving a car, driving a vehicle, behind the wheel, would be raised to between \$300 and \$1,000, from the current fine range of \$60 to \$500, a fairly substantial increase in the fines for using hand-held devices while driving.

Again, I would give credit to and acknowledge the former member for Durham, John O'Toole, who for so many years pushed an amendment to the Highway Traffic Act, I believe, to basically make it illegal to use a cellphone while driving. When he started that quest, I think there were a lot of people who thought it was going to be impossible to enforce, and people had questions about the privacy issues. But at the same time, he maintained and continued to raise that issue in the House for a number of years, and was ultimately successful, showing an example, I think, of how private members can in fact make

a difference in this place and influence public policy and the ultimate decisions of government. It sometimes takes time and you have to be patient and persistent, but certainly he demonstrated those qualities, and, in the end, the government agreed.

I think it's also important to point out that Bill 31 includes—there are numerous indications from the government that the bill will also usher in demerit points, but there's really no mention of demerit points in the proposed legislation. Rather, the government and the minister can bring in regulations, I gather, to deal with that issue over time. Of course, from an opposition perspective, we'd like to see the details. I think it's reasonable to ask questions around what they're planning to do with respect to regulation. If it was set in legislation, it would be, obviously, more clear and better understood by all of us, and it would probably be in the public interest to ensure that those details are forthcoming soon.

With respect to impaired driving, again, I think there's a consensus in the House amongst all three political parties—I can't speak for all parties, but I gather and expect that most members here would agree that we need to continue to take steps to discourage the consumption of alcohol before driving a vehicle. Impaired driving is a serious problem and continues to be a serious problem. Although we've made, I think, great strides towards reducing it, there are still too many instances in our province where people are getting behind the wheel after they've had too much to drink. Obviously, in an impaired condition, the chances of having an accident and hurting themselves and hurting other people on the road go up exponentially. More has to be done in that regard too.

This bill attempts to increase the effectiveness of MTO's conduct behaviour programs, including the ignition interlock program. As we know, ignition interlock systems can be installed in vehicles, ensuring that if a person has had too much to drink—or even, basically, anything to drink, I believe—if they turn their key, the vehicle won't start. It's a mechanism for ensuring that people who have consumed alcohol and perhaps have been convicted of impaired driving in the past are not going to be able to start their cars, and that's a good thing, I think. Again, I think that's something that has arisen from the debate in this Legislature. It seems to me that the member for Simcoe North was pushing that for a number of years as well.

I haven't had a chance to go into all the details of what I'd hoped to talk about, because we have only 10 minutes. I have a number of other things that I'll try to address in my concluding remarks, Mr. Speaker, after the questions and comments. But this is an important piece of legislation that the government has introduced. It deals with a lot of issues with respect to improving highway safety and improving safety for bicyclists. I think it's important that we debate these issues in detail and ensure that the bill goes to a standing committee of the Legislature for further discussion, allowing public input amongst people who have an interest in these issues and who are experts, quite frankly, more so than perhaps some of us

as members, and to hear from the general public as to what needs to be done to improve and strengthen this bill.

I certainly look forward to the continued debate on Bill 31.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure to rise today and to speak to Bill 31, the Transportation Statute Law Amendment Act (Making Ontario's Roads Safer)—and who could argue with that? Of course, our communities are always aware and involved and wanting legislators to take a look at road safety, as it is our most important mechanism for people to get around.

0930

I think what I'd like to do is provide a little bit of background around what we experience in Essex county—mainly a lack of good maintenance and upkeep of roads, tied to budgetary constraints that the provincial government has put on us. There are similar experiences in northern communities, where we see, particularly in winter, that roads are unsafe simply because they're not allocating the proper amount of funding to be able to maintain the current roads that are there. So I think they're putting the cart before the horse in terms of prioritizing this bill.

Needless to say, it is important. It's certainly a matter of health and safety and protection for drivers and of course cyclists, those who use our roads. Some of the provisions are very reasonable when it comes to distracted and drugged driving. We certainly look forward to hearing more about them and actually getting more community input from stakeholders.

One thing that I would say is there is a difference in terms of driving in urban areas like Toronto and driving in my community of Essex. We tend to not actually be as aware—I can tell you my wife is fearful of driving in Toronto because there's so much happening. So there has to be some realization that driving in Ontario is different in different parts, and those types of considerations have to be made. A one-size-fits-all approach to mandating provisions or regulations might not fit. Let's take that into consideration, especially when it comes to speed limits for municipalities and what the pressures might be on them to conform to any type of standards here within the bill.

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

Mr. Grant Crack: I'd like to thank the member from Wellington–Halton Hills and the member from Essex for their comments on this very important bill.

Two components are very important to me. Number one, which I'll speak briefly about, is the ability to allow municipalities or give the tools to municipalities to collect provincial offences fines. I was formerly a mayor for 11 years, sat on the united counties of Stormont, Dundas and South Glengarry county council, and we always, always had issues with collecting provincial offences. So to give municipalities extra tools—I think they'll be very much appreciative of that.

The second component is later on in the actual bill itself, and it's some changes to the tire pressures on

ATVs. If the members would recall, I introduced a motion which was unanimously supported in the House here to allow two-ups and side-by-sides the same privileges four-by-fours currently enjoy across the province, to go on various roads approved by municipalities, and of course approved by the province as well.

I'm looking forward to this particular piece of legislation, continuing the debate. I know that there are stakeholders right across the province—not only ATV owners—looking for these changes so that they can carry their passenger on the back; side-by-sides are very safe now, so to allow them the privilege as well. Also, it will help the farming communities; not only that, but the tourism component as well. Because I hear that in my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, which borders right on the great province of Quebec, where I was born, two-ups and side-by-sides are allowed on Quebec roads. What happens is tourists can't come into Ontario; they have to stop or go elsewhere. So we're losing a lot of economic development by not having the privilege of being able to come to Ontario and enjoy all the great things that Ontario does have to offer.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: I'm happy to chime in. It was a pleasure listening to my colleague from Wellington–Halton Hills remark this morning. The first portion or first half of his remarks obviously brought the importance of our fiscal situation to the Legislature this morning, and to the folks watching at home.

I know we also mentioned a pioneer of this bill, John O'Toole, a former member for Durham. I imagine he's watching this morning, as he usually does, so I want to welcome him this morning to the Legislature and hope that he's enjoying his retirement and so forth.

Just picking up on the comments from the previous member—you know what? I know we're going to be debating for a second time today a bill or a motion on allowing side-by-sides, UTVs etc. on Ontario highways.

I would encourage that member to speak to his transportation minister and encourage him to move forward with that. It is a simple regulation change that could happen with the stroke of a pen, so get off the pot, per se, and get it done, really. We'll be supporting, obviously, that bill or motion this afternoon. I know my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka will also be discussing this important issue in the days coming.

I want to just spend, I guess, 35 seconds on an area of the bill where we do have concerns. Obviously, distracted driving is now the leading cause of death on Ontario highways.

But we've got an issue with this vehicle inspection centre system—very vague details in terms of what this is about. We hear complaints daily about the Drive Clean program; it's just a useless bureaucracy that inconveniences drivers. I'm concerned that here is another system that will grow and grow, and is simply another tax on drivers—so big concerns with that. With that, I'll sit down and listen to the rest of the debate.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: One of the areas I want to touch on is the outsourcing of the new vehicle inspection centre system and, in fact, the existing outsourcing of driver licensing. This system has been shown to be flawed in a number of ways. Many people have spoken out about this. We've seen numerous issues about this. In fact, this is a trend with this government, and it's a serious problem.

When you outsource, one of the major problems that happens is, there is a lack of accountability. We see that with Serco, and we are afraid that we'll see that in the future with the new vehicle inspection centre system.

We're also currently seeing that with Tarion. Tarion is another example. This is an example of, let's know our history so we're not doomed to repeat it. Tarion currently, as it exists, is an arm's-length provider of warranty. It's the only provider of warranty for new homes in Ontario. The system is so flawed; it is flawed from top to bottom. It is biased in favour of builders and developers. It actively denies claims on every occasion it can. In fact, it fights claims in court to make sure that people don't get the coverage that they're entitled to. People are up in arms. They're upset across this province, and this government is doing nothing about this. In fact, the way that it has been set up, the government can't even have proper oversight over it unless we change legislation.

We're asking the government to not make that same mistake now. We know that it doesn't work. We've seen what goes on with Tarion. Let's not do that with Serco and with this new vehicle inspection centre system. My concern is that without proper oversight, without proper accountability, we are going to see a system that does not serve the people of Ontario and, in fact, will be something that works against the people of Ontario. Again, when it comes to Tarion, we're seeing that right now first-hand. We should learn from our history. We should learn from the problems of Tarion and the fact that it's not serving the people, and not engage in something that's going to continue that same mistaken path.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Wellington–Halton Hills. You have two minutes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to thank the members who responded to my brief comments this morning on Bill 31.

When we talk about highway safety, I think there has to be an emphasis on improving highway infrastructure as well. As you know, for a number of years now I've been calling upon the provincial government to place the Highway 6 Morriston bypass project on the ministry's five-year plan for new construction, the southern highways program. I've had numerous discussions with members, and before Christmas I had a fairly long conversation with the Minister of Transportation on the last day of the House. He certainly led me to believe that he was doing everything he could. I have not yet heard back from him, but I am hopeful. I took him at his word that, indeed, he is doing everything he can to try and get that

project on the five-year plan of the ministry. We have broad support from the community, the township of Puslinch council, the county of Wellington and a very large industry association that has come together to advocate. So we're hopeful, and we look to the minister to provide the necessary leadership.

I would also point out—and we know the Good Roads/ROMA convention is coming up next weekend—the concern that many municipalities have with the cancellation of the Connecting Link Program. I'm sure my friend for Northumberland–Quinte West knows about that. There have been a number of municipalities through the last couple of years that have brought and continue to bring this to the attention of the government. The infrastructure programs that have been brought in by the government are not an adequate replacement for the Connecting Link Program.

0940

We have issues in Centre Wellington: a bridge that needs to be built through town—they call it the St. David Street bridge—which is estimated to cost \$2.6 million. The town of Halton Hills had a five-year capital program, including \$9.3 million in needed projects along the connecting link roadways. Basically, they were left high and dry when this project was cancelled.

I would also draw attention to the need for a traffic light in Rockwood in front of the new school, the École Harris Mill school. In the township of Guelph/Eramosa, Mayor Chris White and I are working together on that. We're going to continue to urge the minister to make sure that there's safety on Highway 7 in front of that new school so that the kids can cross the road safely. I will continue to raise that issue as well in the coming weeks and months until it's resolved.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm really happy to have this opportunity to talk about Bill 31, Making Ontario's Roads Safer. As you know, I represent a mainly rural riding, one of those big northern ridings. I represent 33 little communities. I want to talk about how to make our roads safer. I will read from my constituents who have written and who want to share their ideas about making our roads in northern, rural Ontario safer. I'll start with Lynn Castonguay:

"I am e-mailing you today to inform you that I travel Hwy 144 from Onaping to Chelmsford on a daily basis and this roadway has become a hazard in several areas. The area between Dowling and Onaping (mainly before the A.Y. Jackson Lookout)—this is a beautiful park on the side of a river—"is an area that needs immediate attention before someone gets seriously hurt.

"The section has become overcome with potholes that have merged into large ruts in the road: They are deep and when hit have a tendency to send your vehicle out of control. I witnessed it last night with two vehicles in front of me and for me as well. The only way to avoid these is to take the shoulder of the road which is not cleaned" of snow or ice, "or take the middle of the hwy."

"Since this roadway is the only main road to Levack/Onaping"—it takes you to all the way to Timmins if you continue going north—"I think it would be wise for it to be better maintained.

"These should be looked at and filled on a regular basis and the issue was a problem last year and it appears it is going on again this year.

"Thought I should file a complaint in order for this matter to be addressed."

I have this other letter from Mr. G.W. He lives in Onaping Falls, also in my riding.

"Dear Madame Gélinas,

"I've written you on several occasions in the past and I'm here one more time to express my fear and trepidation when driving Hwy 144 between Dowling and the Onaping/Levack turnoff.

"You have been very gracious in replying to my last email and that is much appreciated and I really do understand that these kinds of improvements take time, but that section of Hwy 144 is abominable ... it is getting worse by the day.

"I wish you or one of your able employees would drive that stretch of highway at any time of the day"—by the way, I did go out and drive that stretch of highway, and he's absolutely right—"especially at shift change at the mines or whenever the heavy trucks are using it (which is always)."

Just so that you know, there are three mines in that area of Onaping/Levack, as well as many, many aggregate pits, so there are big trucks. I don't know if you've ever seen the big tandem trucks when they're coming at you—you don't want to be in front of them.

"By the end of the winter, sections of that road will be impassable unless you have a large truck or a tank! These are not the ramblings of a discontented citizen ... I love my province and hold my legislators in very high esteem, but something has to be done before there is a catastrophic accident in that stretch of road. Again, thanks for your time and concern."

That was from G.W. in Onaping, Ontario.

I will continue. This time it's Chris LaBerge, who writes:

"Hello. This letter is regarding the conditions of our highways. I drive from Cartier to Chelmsford for work to support my family. The potholes are so bad there has been damage incurred to my vehicle. You cannot drive in the proper lanes because of these and it is highly unsafe.

"Also there is a lot of wildlife, as well as logging and ore trucks up this way and it is extremely hard to watch out for them when you are dodging potholes in which some are six inches deep...."

He comes up with five concerns:

"(1) Who is going to pay for the repairs to my vehicle?

"(2) When is this stretch of highway going to be resurfaced?

"(3) What will it take for any actions to be done?

"(4) Where are we supposed to drive? (In our own lanes and absolutely destroy our vehicles, or in the middle of the highway and hope for the best.)

“(5) How does our infrastructure become so unsafe and deplorable without anything being done?”

“We the taxpayers/drivers pay for this through our taxes, and are extremely frustrated to have to pay for it again in nonsense repairs” to our vehicle.

“Thank you for your time.”

I will keep going and read an email that I got from James Neville. He called to complain on January 6 of this year. Mr. Neville and his family live in Levack and complain that the road is full of holes, and it is so bad that he blew out one of his studded tires. Those are not cheap, Speaker.

“Why are we being held hostage because of MTO negligence?” he asked. He has no choice but to use this road to travel to work. He is worried that his family members will get killed, travelling this stretch of highway. The contractors are using a hand tamper to patch the holes. Of course, they are not sticking and are flying off into windshields.

I received a call from—she didn’t want me to use her name, but her initials are E.B. She says that Highway 144 is terrible: “I can’t avoid the holes, and the patching is a hazard because it doesn’t stick to the road and flies off into our windshields. Why don’t they fix it properly the first time? It would save a lot of money. The road was like this last winter. They had all summer to fix it. These contractors are not doing a good job.”

I’ll go on with Mrs. G.T., her initials:

“Hi France:

“It is with regret that I find I am writing to you once again about the deterioration of this stretch of highway.” She’s talking about Highway 144 between Chelmsford and Onaping.

“Over the past month, I have watched numerous stretches of potholes becoming a continuing stretch of potholes on each side of the highway and deeper by the day.

“It seems worse than last year at this time.

“This morning a truck careened over the guardrails into a deep rock-engulfed ravine, the exact spot a car went over one month ago; around a rock cut”—second accident: exact same place, because of the potholes.

“I pray each night as I return home that I will make it home safely as I cannot tell where every hole is in the dark and the only place to avoid them seems to be driving as close as you can to the centre line.

“It’s nerve-racking when you know you are passing 30 to 50 hauling and dump trucks each way.” Those are the trucks that service the mines and the logging as well as the aggregates.

“I pray each night as I return home that I will not get into an accident and will make it home, due to the terrible condition of this highway.

“Also, is there a fund I can put a claim in for replacing a tire and front-end spring which broke due to hitting pothole after pothole? My mechanic said these springs are half an inch in diameter and it takes a lot to break them. Within 10 minutes the broken spring punctured two

tires. Luckily this happened in my driveway and not on the highway.

“I look forward to hearing from you once again.

“Last year after I emailed you, within four to five days, at minus 36 degrees Celsius, they were fixing the potholes at night. I had to laugh.”

Ron Leclair also wrote to me. Ron lives in Onaping. “The hot patches aren’t working either—cars ripping out the asphalt and flying at windshields of the car behind them. I’ve had to replace windshields twice.”

0950

I shared some of those stories with you this morning, Speaker, and believe me, I have way more. While this Legislature is talking about making roads safer, we know that we have a safety issue in my riding. We know that we have a stretch of road that is so dangerous that we can tell where the next accident will happen. But when you add to this 30-, 50- or 60-ton trucks coming at you non-stop—24 hours a day, seven days a week, those big trucks are on the road. You’re trying to make your way home, because it is our only road. We deserve safety on our roads, too.

I agree that distracted driving is dangerous, but I also agree that people in northern Ontario need roads that are safe. Right now, I hope you will share with the constituents that have taken the time to write that we need to do better.

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

Mr. Yvan Baker: I’m proud to speak to this issue today. I think this is a really important issue. I know that a lot of us, if not all of us, have been impacted by road safety, the importance of making sure that, as we travel our roads, we know that the people of Ontario are safe and can get from work and can get to play in a quick but also safe manner. That has to be paramount.

We also have to make sure that our roads are moving. This is important to support not only our quality of life but also our economy. I know that is something that’s so important to all of us, and I know it’s critically important to our Minister of Transportation, Minister Del Duca. I know he’s working very hard on these issues.

There are a number of things that the government is doing to address these things. I know the member opposite talked about roads in rural areas. You’re absolutely right that the issues that touch us in terms of safety and in terms of making sure that our roads are moving apply to all parts of Ontario. I have to emphasize that for the past 13 years we’ve been ranked either number one or number two in terms of road safety.

Hon. Michael Chan: Wow. That’s a good record.

Mr. Yvan Baker: That’s a record to be proud of. But we’re not resting on our laurels. Minister Del Duca is not resting on his laurels. There’s more work to be done. On average, one person is killed on our roads every 18 hours, and one person is injured every eight and a half minutes. We really need to keep working on road safety.

One of the things that I wanted to speak to was just a couple of the items that I know are in Bill 31 that I think

are important. I can't possibly cover it all, because there are a number of elements to this bill that are important. But, first of all, something that I think is really important is increased penalties for distracted driving. We see it every day: people who are distracted behind the wheel. Increased penalties, I think, are an incredibly important element to this, not only in terms of the fines but also the demerit points that people will face.

There are measures in this bill about impaired driving. There are measures here about bus and vehicle safety. There are measures about pedestrian safety and about helping municipalities in order to collect defaulted provincial offences fines. All of these measures are critical to making sure our roads are safe, making sure they move quickly, making sure we enjoy the quality of life, but have the safety that all Ontarians would like and deserve.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I listened very intently to the member from Nickel Belt. We all know that we're here to serve our constituents, and I really appreciated hearing the letters from her constituents.

What I hear often—I get more emails than phone calls, which I guess is a sign of the times, and what I hear often from emails is that people want to be able to get where they need to go, and they want to get there safely. What they are very concerned about in Thornhill is their children's safety. People would like to have their kids ride their bikes to go a mile or two miles. It's not that far. We all did it when we were kids. They just feel that the roads aren't safe for them.

What this bill is really supposed to be about, I would hope, is to make our roads safer. What seems to be coming out is a lot more red tape and a lot of costs to the drivers.

What we need to focus on is how we can make the roads safer. It's not always fun to do the maintenance work. People tend to want to put money into new projects on which they can have big fancy announcements, but the reality is that cars are being damaged by potholes and by unsafe road conditions, by speed bumps when the roads weren't cleared of snow and people didn't see the speed bumps. As the member from Nickel Belt mentioned, the springs on cars, the suspension, get damaged by all these things, and we're actually making the cars unsafe if we're not keeping our roads well maintained and well cleared of snow.

I would ask the Speaker for permission to show a picture. I know we're not allowed to show props, but it shows the very beautiful, creative bike lanes next to very safe pedestrian conditions in Japan. It's very clearly marked by a different type of paving colours and signage, and it just looks so beautiful that even if you actually have nowhere to go, you want to go for a walk or get on your bike and use those bike lanes. So I think that's what we should be working on: creative ways to get people to use our roads safely.

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

M. Gilles Bisson: Monsieur, la 144, ça doit être le pire bout de chemin qu'on a vu dans cette province depuis longtemps. Quand tu arrives dans le bout du Halfway Lake Provincial Park en descendant—moi, je le sais parce que j'ai eu l'occasion de visiter Sudbury une couple de fois cet hiver, une belle place pour aller faire les vacances au milieu de l'hiver. C'était vraiment horrible. La condition de la route est telle que tu as besoin de vraiment ralentir. Si tu essaies de conduire juste à 80 kilomètres à l'heure, tu prends vraiment la chance d'avoir un accident parce que l'asphalte est si décollé du « top » du chemin. C'est franchement déplorable jusqu'à quel point ce chemin-là n'est pas bon.

Je sais que la députée M^{me} Gélinas a soulevé la question avec le ministre, puis avec le ministère. Espérons que ça va être réparé cet été, parce qu'on sait que M^{me} Gélinas est toujours bien capable d'avancer ses dossiers. Mais je pense que ça parle d'un fléau—c'est un beau mot, ça, fléau—qui est beaucoup plus prononcé ces jours-ci, puis ça, c'est les investissements qu'on fait et qu'on ne fait pas, des fois, quand ça vient à nos chemins.

Je sais que la première ministre, qui a quasiment beaucoup de bon sens, veut investir dans l'infrastructure des transports en commun ici au sud de la province de l'Ontario, à Toronto, à Hamilton et autres. Nous, les néo-démocrates, on dit : « Écoute, ça fait beaucoup de bon sens. On n'a pas de problème. Mais n'oubliez pas qu'il y a une autre partie de la province qui est le Nord. On a plus de routes au Nord, en géographie, que vous autres avez au sud de la province, et on a besoin de mieux entretenir ces routes. »

Le chemin est assez grave qu'on pourrait commencer un jardin pour être capable de planter des concombres au milieu de la 144. La terre est assez défrichée que tu pourrais—the challenge of the day, right? Tu aurais pu commencer un jardin sur la ligne jaune de la 144 et planter des concombres, parce que je pense qu'il y a une chance qu'ils pourraient pousser à travers de cet asphalte.

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

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Good morning, Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity. Thanks to all the colleagues who have pointed out how important this bill is.

I was driving down from Barrie one day. The gridlock was pretty bad, but we were moving about 40 kilometres an hour. I looked at the car beside me and there was a young woman frantically texting away on her phone. And then I realized that in the back seat was a beautiful little baby, in the seat behind her. I felt so badly because just as she was texting, somebody cut in in front of her, and I don't know how there was not an accident. I felt so badly for that little girl. I think we need to deter people from doing that. One of the best ways to do that is to hit people in the pocketbook, unfortunately.

Also, one of the very important parts of this bill: As SCFEA travelled the province, many of the mayors of the municipalities and also Mayor Lehman in Barrie have let me know that there are millions of dollars of unpaid Provincial Offences Act fines. I believe that this bill will

help municipalities to collect those fines. I pay \$6,600 a year in municipal taxes for a subdivision home. Our municipality desperately needs that money that is owed to them, and I hope that everyone understands that this is a very important part of this bill as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I thank everyone for their comments. I return to the member for Nickel Belt. You have two minutes.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke Centre, the member for Thornhill, my colleague from Timmins–James Bay and the member from Barrie for their comments.

1000

What I tried to do this morning was to give you a bit of a glimpse into what it means to live in northern Ontario, what it means to live in Nickel Belt. The roads are really bad. I did reach out to the ministry and the Minister of Transportation, and they have given me a schedule to fix the road. They've actually gone out of contract. There is a contractor from down south who is presently in Nickel Belt trying to patch the road, but at minus 42 this morning in Nickel Belt with the wind chill, and minus 36 the day before and minus 38 the day before that, it's not always obvious to be able to do this in the middle of winter—not to mention that there's snow everywhere. A stretch of it will be repaved next summer, but it won't be until the following summer when the next stretch of it is done.

For the people who use it every day, those timelines are too long. Too many people feel that their life is in danger with this timetable. We certainly appreciate that they're trying to fix it right now, and they have answered my plea to do something, but this schedule of some of it next summer and some of it not until the summer of 2016 is hard for the people who travel that road every day to accept.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It might be part of their agricultural policy—more farmland.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes; if there is a cucumber plant growing in the middle of the highway, Gilles, I will let you know.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm thrilled and honoured to rise in the House today to speak to a critically important piece of legislation for our province: the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act, Bill 31. In doing so, I join my colleagues opposite from Nickel Belt, Kitchener–Conestoga, Etobicoke Centre, Thornhill, Timmins–James Bay and Barrie. Thank you, colleagues, for participating in this important conversation.

As has already been noted, Ontario enjoys the safest roads in North America. An important piece of the framework is because we have the kinds of laws that really make Ontarians feel safe, and in reality they are safe. But it's worth spending a few minutes, I think, talking about the importance of Bill 31 and what it's destined to do.

It is part of a broader package of legislative and subsequent supported regulatory amendments to the Highway

Traffic Act destined to improve road safety, enhance the collection of defaulted Provincial Offences Act fines, improve the Highway 407 East Act and address a number of housekeeping items that are important in the ongoing maintenance and safety of our roads.

The intended outcomes of these proposed changes in this broad-ranging bill include improvements related to impaired driving by drugs and alcohol, distracted driving, medically unfit drivers, truck, vehicle and bus safety, pedestrian safety, cycling safety—I'm going to talk about that in a moment, Speaker—collection of defaulted POA fines, and of course the Highway 407 East Act.

The road safety issues that the bill aims to address continue to be persistent challenges in our province, unfortunately. According to recent statistics, over 45% of drivers killed in Ontario were found to have drugs or a combination of drugs and alcohol in their system; drinking-and-driving fatalities represented nearly one quarter of all fatalities in 2011; between 2008 and 2012, an average of 14% of convicted alcohol-impaired drivers were repeat offenders—that is indeed a sad statistic—and if current collision trends continue, fatalities from distracted driving may exceed those from drinking and driving by 2016.

In 2011, pedestrians constituted approximately one in five motor-vehicle-related fatalities. In my previous life, before I was elected, as the CEO of the Share the Road Cycling Coalition, Ontario's cycling advocacy and policy organization, I was proud to be part of the Cycling Death Review, conducted by the Ontario coroner, that looked into cycling deaths between 2000 and 2012. There were 125 Ontarians who lost their lives while cycling, and that is indeed something that we should all be interested in addressing.

It's often said that it takes a village to raise a child, and this legislation is no different. I'm proud of the fact that it includes ideas from members opposite. I think Ontarians expect that from us, Speaker. They want the best of us; they want us to work together. This bill is reflective of suggestions and wonderful ideas from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, the member from Simcoe North, the member from Nepean–Carleton and the member from Parkdale–High Park. It is also the culmination of years of hard work by officials in the Ministry of Transportation and across 12 government ministries who embraced the #CycleON strategy, which I was proud to launch in September 2013 with the member for Toronto Centre, the previous Minister of Transportation.

I spoke a moment ago about the broad-ranging aspects of the bill, and I want to focus, as I mentioned, now a little bit on the cycling safety part, Speaker. It's an issue of interest and concern to all Ontarians, including people in my riding. I know our mayor and city council and citizens in Burlington care deeply about creating the kind of bicycle-friendly community that we're now seeing across the world, as cities and countries move to become more bicycle friendly, recognizing the benefits to a more bicycle-friendly community.

What are those, Speaker? Well, they are environmental. Cycling reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

Greenhouse gas emissions currently account for about 40% of all emissions, and getting those lower is in everyone's interest.

Economic opportunities: 40% of our trips in Canada are less than five kilometres. If we could encourage people to ride their bikes more often instead of taking their cars for those five-kilometre trips, how much further ahead would we be? People would be fitter. They'd be healthier. Our air would be cleaner. Our communities would be more connected.

Our children would have opportunities to ride to school. In 1971, 87% of Canadian children rode their bikes and walked to school. Now that number is about 13%. So we've done an absolute flip, and consequently, we're seeing record and rising rates of obesity in our children. The Ontario Medical Association has pointed to the fact that this may be the first generation that doesn't outlive their parents. Why aren't we finding ways to create opportunities to get our children cycling and walking to school?

When I was at Share the Road, we did a survey of four Ontario school districts, and we found the number one reason that children weren't riding their bikes to school was convenience. Their parents found it more convenient to drive them. I think we've got a lot to do to change the conversation and work to do that. Certainly this legislation will help to create those kinds of bicycle-friendly communities and give municipalities the tools they need.

Let me just highlight some of the active transportation and cycling safety initiatives that are highlighted in Bill 31. Speaker, I just want to underline the fact that when I was at Share the Road, we worked doggedly on this legislation, with members opposite I might add, which is a very nice thing to be able to say in terms of the co-operation that's engendered in this bill, and I highlighted that a moment ago.

Promoting active transportation and cyclist safety is resident in Bill 31 and is evidenced by requiring drivers of motor vehicles to maintain a minimum distance of one metre when passing cyclists on highways. This legislation, called the one-metre safe passing law, is something that we worked on very diligently with the member from Parkdale-High Park when I was at Share the Road and is now being embraced by our government. There is a jurisdiction in Canada that has this legislation already; it's Nova Scotia. There are 25 US states that currently require motorists to leave at least three feet of space when passing a cyclist, and it has led to enormous reductions in collisions and enhanced cycling safety. The number one reason, unfortunately—and I knew this when I was at Share the Road because we did a lot of polling and data collection—that 60% of Ontarians don't ride their bikes is because they're too afraid to do so. That is definitely a number that we all should aspire to reduce.

Another piece of Bill 31 that speaks to the cycling agenda is permitting cyclists to ride on the paved shoulders of all unrestricted highways. As I highlighted, the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka worked very diligently on this kind of legislation for years through private

members' bills. It's now being embraced by our government. Good for him for his solid work in this regard. That's going to not only make it cycling friendly; it's going to create opportunities for cycling tourism.

In the year 2000, the province of Quebec invested in something called the Route verte, which is a 4,300-kilometre cycling route that spans the province and nets the province of Quebec \$140 million a year in tourism revenue. Ontario has those opportunities resident within it. We have beautiful roadways. We have beautiful rural infrastructure in particular, wide-open spaces, wonderful wineries, restaurants and opportunities for Ontarians to enjoy.

I know the Waterfront Regeneration Trust is an organization that is working with tourism, cycling stakeholders, municipalities, road safety folks and the MTO right across our province in creating those kinds of tourism opportunities so that Ontario residents can get out and enjoy their bikes. But having paved shoulders to ride on is going to make an enormous difference.

It's also great for vehicles and trucks. We heard from the Ontario Trucking Association that having a paved shoulder will prevent collisions and save lives. That, in and of itself, is very important. I know, again, that the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has worked diligently on that.

This legislation will permit contraflow bike lanes on one-way highways and roadways. This is also incredibly important. You see these all over Europe. They're incredibly important in terms of creating a cycling network in municipalities and elsewhere.

Authorizing the use of bicycle signal heads on traffic control systems: Speaker, the city of Ottawa, which is one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in the country, has cycling signals that are destined and focused on cyclists at intersections, allowing them to proceed through the intersection before the flow of traffic, saving lives and making it easier for them.

These are the kinds of measures that municipalities want and need. They're asking our government, and we're responding, Speaker, because we know how important that is.

Increasing the penalties for dooring: What is dooring, people may wonder. Unfortunately, if we, as drivers, don't look before we open our door into the oncoming lane, a cyclist may be coming. It's incredibly important. The CAA is poised to do some very important work in this area. Making sure that we're very safe and that we avoid dooring will save lives and, again, create safer roads for all of us.

There are some pieces relative to fines and increasing the fines and making sure that cyclists do their part. I know that sharing the road is everyone's responsibility. When I was at Share the Road, that's something that we certainly espoused. Cyclists are safe—they're also motorists, by the way, and they know that they have to do their part.

Thank you, Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to an issue of great passion and interest for me, the cycling

safety of our communities in our province. I'm very proud to be part of a government that has embraced Bill 31. I want to thank the members opposite for their years of work on bringing this legislation to the fore.

Again, Speaker, thank you for this opportunity.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 1012 to 1030.

REPORT, CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Can I have order, please? Thank you.

I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a report from the Chief Electoral Officer with respect to the complaints pertaining to the Sudbury by-election.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce Lauren Wu, who is going to be volunteering in our office now. Welcome, Lauren.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to introduce Hilary Martin, who is in the members' gallery. Hilary is the president of the Carleton University Young Liberals and was the youth chair of my most recent campaign. I want to thank Hilary for all her hard work in mobilizing a lot of young people and engaging them in politics. Welcome to Queen's Park, Hilary.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my delight to introduce Sheena Weir and Jennifer Rubel from the Ontario law society.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: To join us in the House today, we have the parents of page captain Eileen Zhang—her mother, Kathy Fan, and father, Richard Zhang—and her brother, David Zhang.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am delighted to welcome to the House this morning Naguib Gouda from Career Edge and Jasmine Irwin from the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. Welcome.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to welcome representatives here today from Action Ontario: Lisa Hooper, Glen Hutzul, Jennifer Tyrrell, Dr. Brian Kirsh, Anne Coffey and Dr. Angela Mailis-Gagnon. Chronic pain is an important issue, and I appreciate their advocacy on behalf of patients. Dr. Hoskins will be speaking at their lunch reception in room 230, and I hope everybody will be there. Thank you.

Mr. Han Dong: Mr. Speaker, as can you tell from my outfit, it is the Chinese new year, or lunar new year. It's celebrated every year.

I just want to welcome the president of the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations, Mr.

Cheng Yi Wei, and the secretary, Mr. Phuc Tran. Later on, they'll be hosting a reception at Queen's Park after question period in room 247. I welcome all the members to join us.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very happy to welcome students, parents and teachers from Gandatsetiagon Public School—we call it Gandy public school—in Pickering. I met with them this morning, a great group of grade 5 students here. Welcome.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: We have in the east gallery my senior mining policy adviser, Drew Redden, who, more importantly, is here with his mother, Joanne, and his sister Jill. Let's welcome them. Thank you very much. That would be Joanne Redden and Jill Redden.

Mr. Yvan Baker: First of all, I'd like to welcome the students from St. Clement Catholic School in the heart of Markland Wood in my riding of Etobicoke Centre. They're here visiting today, and I think they're just filing in.

I also had the fortune this morning of meeting with some young people that I'd like to introduce. Normally folks come to my office and they raise issues that are of importance. Today I had a group of four young people come to me and speak with me, not to raise issues but to thank me and other MPPs for our public service. It's very unique and special. I'd like to thank them for engaging the young people in the political process. From MY Canada: Lia Milousis—

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It's Carleton University Day at Queen's Park today and I want to welcome the fearless leader of Carleton University, President Dr. Roseann O'Reilly Runte. Along with her today we have: Suzanne Blanchard, Mark Savenkoff, Don Cumming, Peter Ricketts and Kathy McKinley. There is a reception in room 228 today at 5 p.m.

Ms. Soo Wong: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear pins in recognition of Chinese New Year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Scarborough—Aurora is seeking unanimous consent to wear the pins that have been provided for all members in both galleries. Do we agree? Agreed.

The Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I would like to join my colleague from Etobicoke Centre in welcoming the students from MY Canada who are here to thank us all for our public service. I think it's a wonderful group.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Ça me fait grandement plaisir aujourd'hui de vous présenter un ami très sincère, le frère Maxime Allard, qui est le président du Collège universitaire dominicain à Ottawa. Bienvenue, Maxime.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: On behalf of the member for Etobicoke North I want to welcome the parents of page captain Ishani Sharma: Ishani's mother Nishtha Sharma and father Rakesh Sharma are here at Queen's Park today. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, you mentioned this morning that the Chief Electoral Officer has tabled a report to this Legislature. Quite frankly, it's a bombshell.

I wrote the Chief Electoral Officer on December 15 regarding perceived contraventions of section 96.1 of the Election Act.

In the report from the Chief Electoral Officer: "No Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario has ever conducted a regulatory investigation into allegations of bribery or ever reported an apparent contravention of the home statutes of my office to the Attorney General."

Further in the report, it says: "Having reviewed the evidence and findings from this regulatory investigation, I am of the opinion that the actions of Gerry Lougheed Jr. and Patricia Sorbara amount to apparent contraventions of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act as reflected in my attached report. Consequently, I have reported this matter to the Attorney General."

Premier, when are you going to do the right thing and announce today the resignation of Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed Jr.?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite is well aware, this is information that has just been received. From the outset, we've been clear with Elections Ontario that they have our full co-operation. We're glad that Elections Ontario took this issue seriously and they've determined that the opposition's allegations against me and the member from Sudbury were baseless.

Patricia Sorbara will continue to offer her full co-operation as Elections Ontario's examination moves to the next phase in the process.

I understand that the complaint has been referred to the Ministry of the Attorney General for further examination by the proper authorities.

As the member opposite knows, Elections Ontario's examination is entirely independent of the government and neither the Attorney General nor her political staff have any involvement in that process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: Premier, this report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. All 107 members have a duty to uphold openness and transparency in government. You, yourself, said in your throne speech that you were going to have an open and transparent government, and you were going to do politics differently.

Premier, the report speaks for itself. There are alleged contraventions of the act. The members on this side of the House and the members in the opposition have all written to the OPP and to the Chief Electoral Officer.

When are you going to stand up in your place, do the right thing and cut these two bad apples loose?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, we have all just received this information. We have said that we will continue to work in full co-operation with Elections Ontario. The fact is that this is the next phase in Elections Ontario's process, and we will let the process unfold.

Interjection.

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

Final supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: We're members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. We can decide that we're going to carry and do politics differently in this province. In the opposition, we were there. We wrote the Chief Electoral Officer. We listened to the tapes. We could hear it. Ontarians could hear it.

We're asking you a very simple question now that the report is here and we all have a copy of it. Do the right thing: Call for their resignations, and let's move forward.

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, again, as I have said, we have all just received this information. I understand the political imperative of the party opposite.

We will continue to work with Elections Ontario; Patricia Sorbara will continue to work with Elections Ontario. I am glad that they have taken this seriously and that they have tabled this report.

As I have said, this doesn't change the fact that any suggestion that anything was offered in exchange for any action is false. That has not changed, and that will not change. The fact is that we were working to keep this young man involved in the process. That's what Patricia Sorbara was doing.

We've just received this information, Mr. Speaker, and we'll take it under consideration.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is back to the Premier. I'm going to read you again a paragraph from the Chief Electoral Officer's report: "Having reviewed the evidence and findings from this regulatory investigation, I am of the opinion that the actions of Gerry Lougheed Jr. and Patricia Sorbara amount to apparent contraventions of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act as reflected in my attached report. Consequently, I have reported this matter to the Attorney General of Ontario in accordance with section 4.0.2 of the Election Act."

Premier, if you stand with these two, you're going to fall with these two. Stand up and call for their resignations.

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the sentiment from the member opposite. As I have said, we've just received this information. We received the information from Elections Ontario. The member has quoted from one letter. I will quote from the letter regarding my involvement: "Having reviewed the evidence and findings from this regulatory investigation"—

Ms. Sylvia Jones: She still works for you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. I'm going to ask the members from Dufferin-Caledon and Huron-Bruce to come to order please—second time for both of you.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —"I am of the opinion that the actions of Premier Wynne do not amount to an apparent contravention of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act."

Similarly, in the letter regarding Glenn Thibeault, "Having reviewed the evidence and findings from this regulatory investigation, I am of the opinion that the actions of Mr. Thibeault do not amount to an apparent contravention of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act."

Mr. Speaker, we received all of this information—

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Again, my question goes back to the Premier. In recent months, your government has distanced itself from alleged criminals like Ben Levin for child porn; Chris Mazza for corruption and expense scandals; and Livingston, Miller and Faist for destruction of gas plant documents.

Premier, you are degrading your office. Cut this bad apple loose and apologize to the people of Ontario.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, we have just received this information today, and we will continue to co-operate with Elections Ontario, as will Patricia Sorbara. But nothing in this information today changes the fact that there was no offer for any action. Any allegation that that was the case is—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Why don't we just listen to the facts?

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: That would be novel.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is not helping either. Thank you.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have deep respect for Elections Ontario and for the work that the Chief Electoral Officer does, and I understand that they are moving now into the next phase.

But the fact is that what I did and what we have done on this side was work to keep a young person involved in the party. That is what we did.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Regrettably, I've heard some unparliamentary language. I can't identify the individual, and I wish they would never say that again.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Premier, you can spin it any way you want. You can talk about getting a young person involved. You can issue press releases saying the tapes exonerate your staff. But clearly the proof is in these documents. There are contraventions.

You can do the right thing, Premier. You can be what you said you would be at our inaugural meeting of this Legislature. You can do politics differently. You can be open and transparent.

Premier, apologize to the people of Ontario. Let's get these people's resignations, and let's move forward.

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I received this information this morning; I've said that repeatedly. Patricia Sorbara will continue to work with Elections Ontario. The fact is that Elections Ontario has moved into the next phase. The Attorney General's office and other authorities will now take that investigation to the next stage. I will take all of this information under advisement.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Today the Chief Electoral Officer said, "I am of the opinion that the actions of Gerry Lougheed Jr. and Patricia Sorbara constitute apparent contraventions of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act."

I want to ask the Premier: When is she going to actually fire Pat Sorbara and remove Mr. Lougheed from his position as the chair of the Police Services Board in Sudbury?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have answered this question six times already, I will answer it once again. We just received this information. I've said from the outset that we will work, and that Patricia Sorbara will work, in full co-operation with Elections Ontario. We have done that. We will continue to work with the authorities. As I just received this information this morning, we are taking it under advisement.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Elections Ontario is non-partisan. They've investigated the actions of the Premier's office and her operatives, and they say that Gerry Lougheed and Pat Sorbara broke the law.

When will the Premier admit that this has happened and ask for their jobs? When will she make sure that she does the right thing and remove these people from their responsibilities because they no longer have the public trust?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, let's just be clear that that is not what the letters have said. That's the point

that I was making earlier: that in terms of the facts, nothing has changed. Elections Ontario is talking about allegations. They're talking about apparent allegations, about the appearances.

The fact is that there was no commitment to offer anything in exchange for an action. That has not changed from yesterday to today. I made a decision about appointing a candidate. We worked to keep the past candidate involved. That's the fact.

Elections Ontario has taken this seriously, and I'm pleased that they've taken it seriously. The process will unfold, but nothing in terms of the facts has changed from yesterday to today.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The report is one thing, but what actually happened is something else altogether. It's time this Premier comes clean on exactly what happened around the stink in Sudbury.

When this Premier—this Premier—learned that David Livingston was the subject of a police investigation, she rushed in to say, "That is not the way a government should operate. That is not the way a Premier's office should conduct itself. And it is not the way my office operates."

1050

Now, Elections Ontario has an unprecedented finding in their investigation, and they say that the Election Act was in fact broken. When will this Premier fire Pat Sorbara and make sure that Mr. Lougheed is removed from his position of public trust on the police services board in Sudbury?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Once again, let's just be clear, Mr. Speaker: That is not what Elections Ontario has said. Elections Ontario is talking about "apparent" actions, "apparent contraventions." The facts have not changed from yesterday to today. Elections Ontario is going to the next phase. They have referred the complaint to the Ministry of the Attorney General for further examination by the proper authorities. This is in process.

Mr. Speaker, I received this information this morning, as everyone in the House did. That I have said—

Mr. John Yakabuski: There's enough of a smell on it. Do the right thing. Cut her loose.

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

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is to the Premier. We now have Mr. Lougheed, Ms. Sorbara, Elections Ontario and the OPP with one version of what happened in Sudbury, and the Premier with another version of what happened. So we have two different versions. We talked about that yesterday. It's clear the Premier is still sticking to that today.

The Chief Electoral Officer said this: "Having reviewed the evidence"—reviewed the evidence—"and

findings from this regulatory investigation, I am of the opinion that the actions of Gerry Lougheed Jr. and Patricia Sorbara amount to apparent contraventions of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act...."

Now, this Premier has her version of the truth and everybody else has a different one. Premier, it must be getting pretty lonely, is what I would say. Whose version of the truth can the people of Ontario believe?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important to read closely what has been said: "in the opinion" and an "apparent contravention." There isn't a conclusion in that language. What Elections Ontario has done is they have passed this process on to the next phase, through the Attorney General's office, for further examination by the proper authorities. That is what the next stage is. We all just received this information this morning, and I will take it under advisement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier says that nothing in fact has changed, but that is not true. Today, Elections Ontario confirmed that there was a wrongdoing in Sudbury. This is a non-partisan organization. This non-partisan organization did their jobs, and they came to the conclusion—

Hon. Brad Duguid: That's not what they confirmed. You keep making things up. Stop putting words in their mouth.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —that Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed offered bribes to Andrew Olivier. Now, the question remains, will this Premier do the right thing? If she's not prepared to actually fire Pat Sorbara and Mr. Lougheed, will she confirm that she will be appointing an independent investigator and prosecutor for this process to go forward?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I think it's time to actually take a look at what happened. In this byelection, the best candidate—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Actually, don't stop the clock. Order, please. Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Yes, Speaker. The people of Sudbury have spoken. In this election, the best candidate—and the only party with a positive message—was elected. I understand that hurts the party opposite.

We've been very clear. The Premier has said over and over again: "We did have a conversation with a past candidate about how to stay involved, how to continue to make a positive contribution." I think nobody here would suggest that those aren't conversations that happen within parties.

The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock resigned her seat and accepted a paid position on the same day. She said, and I quote from the Toronto Star, "Scott, who will now be the party's paid election readiness chair"—

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this is a shameful demonstration of a government that simply will not take responsibility for its actions. The people of this province deserve so much better than this, Speaker. They deserve to have trust in the Premier's office. They deserve to have trust in the government. They deserve to have the people who are working for the Premier and the government to be above this kind of accusation. And when this kind of accusation comes forward, they deserve to have a Premier who steps up to the challenge and behaves in a way that's dignified and appropriate for a Premier. That's not happening today.

I will ask the question one more time: Will this Premier fire Pat Sorbara? Will she make sure Mr. Lougheed is no longer the chair of the police services board in Sudbury? Will she appoint an independent prosecutor from outside of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I'll continue with this quote from the Toronto Star from January 10, 2009: "Scott ... conceded it is 'a very'" difficult "'issue'"—a very difficult issue—"to get MPPs, who have no pension plan, to resign." So—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, it is not credible—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry will come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, it is simply not credible for the opposition parties to pretend—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —that these aren't conversations that don't happen in the political process. I suspect there were difficult conversations with Jonah Schein, with Paul Ferreira, with Laurie Scott, the member from Kawartha Lakes. In politics, this happens. We have talked—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. The member from Renfrew will come to order. The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound will come to order, and the member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order. It's the second time for two of you.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. Premier, you apparently don't mind living and conducting your office in the shadows of shame, disgust and malfeasance. But, Premier, your actions cast a shadow—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. I will ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: But your actions cast a long shadow over this whole institution and every member in it. It also casts a long, dark shadow over the province—your actions.

Any Premier—any honourable Premier—would take this seriously. You mentioned that the Chief Electoral Officer took this matter seriously, but clearly you are not. You are prepared to bring harm and injury to this institution.

Will you do the honourable thing and relieve Sorbara and Lougheed from their jobs until this matter is cleared up in the courts?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me once again say that we all just got this information, Mr. Speaker. What I will not do is take rash advice from the other side of the floor until I've had an opportunity to consider all of the information.

Let me just read from the report. This is page 8 in the report. What it says is, "To form an opinion that conduct amounts to an 'apparent contravention' as set out in s. 4.0.2 of the Election Act, I must be satisfied, based on the evidence obtained in my investigation, that there is a *prima facie* case of a contravention.

"This means I must be aware of sufficient facts that, if proven correct, would constitute a contravention of the Election Act or the Election Finances Act."

He goes on to say, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence." That is what he says in the report.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Again to the Premier: Premier, the Chief Electoral Officer cannot prosecute. However, the Chief Electoral Officer is an independent, non-partisan officer of this House. He has a duty, and obviously he's taking it seriously.

Everybody knows what the right thing to do here is. The Chief Electoral Officer has spelled it out clearly that these allegations are a *prima facie* case of wrongdoing. He has recommended further action. How come you won't take any action at all, Premier? No action at all. Have those two bad apples removed and do the honourable thing and take away this dark shadow that you're casting over all of this institution.

1100

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just go over what I quoted, and let me just add to it and go a little bit further. Again, what the electoral officer says: "This means I must be aware of sufficient facts that, if proven correct, would constitute a contravention of the Election Act or the Election Finances Act. When I form an opinion that there has been an 'apparent contravention', I do not weigh questions of credibility or balance competing facts as between the parties. I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

That is what the Chief Electoral Officer has said, Mr. Speaker. He has passed on this information to the next phase of his process.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is directed to the Premier. Premier, you're talking about taking this to the next phase. You say that you'll take Elections Ontario's report under advisement. The fact is that political interference is at the heart of this scandal.

Will the Premier commit today to take herself out of this process? Will she take her Liberal Attorney General out of this process? And will you appoint an independent prosecutor to prosecute these charges?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I respect and trust the processes that we have in place in Ontario. I respect that Elections Ontario and our judicial system are of the highest quality in the world. I'm sorry that the NDP doesn't have that faith in our institutions in Ontario, but we do on this side of the House.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're going to let this process play out. I will once again read into the record what the Chief Electoral Officer has said. He said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges," of whom we have excellent members in this province, Mr. Speaker.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: To the Premier: Premier, it's in fact your disrespect of the process that's put you in this mess in the first place. The law is clear.

I'll say to you again that the Chief Electoral Officer has said his report is "now in the hands of the Ministry of the Attorney General," your Liberal cabinet minister. I'm looking at the minister, the Attorney General, who's sitting in the Liberal front bench, and I'm asking: Will the Premier take out of the hands of the Liberal Attorney General and put into the hands of an independent prosecutor from outside Ontario the responsibility to actually prosecute these charges?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The Chief Electoral Officer is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. The Chief Electoral Officer has a process in place to investigate complaints. As has been mentioned previously on numerous occasions, this process exclusively involves non-partisan officials within the Ministry of the Attorney General.

No political staff, including myself or members of my political office, have anything to do with this process. The system is already designed so that only non-partisan officials handle any complaint. The third party has been made aware of this process.

It is my understanding that the matter is being dealt with by another prosecution service.

ONTARIO HERITAGE WEEK

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. This week is Ontario Heritage Week. Yesterday, we had the members of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario here with us in the Legislature—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All members have the right to ask questions in silence.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: As a past president of ACO Cambridge, I'm proud to have worked with the ACO. The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario was incorporated in 1933. They had a vision to preserve the best of Ontario's architecture and natural areas that continues today.

Preserving our heritage boosts tourism and provides economic benefits such as revenue from the film industry. Murdoch Mysteries chose my riding of Cambridge as a filming location. Heritage tourists stay longer and spend more, and this is a growing area of tourism. One year, the annual heritage house tour in my riding of Cambridge brought in 600 visitors from around the province.

Speaker, could the minister please tell the members of this House about Ontario Heritage Week?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to start by wishing all Ontarians who are celebrating Chinese New Year a happy new year.

I also want to thank the member from Cambridge for her advocacy around heritage here in the province of Ontario. Heritage Week is an amazing opportunity to put a spotlight on promoting and protecting our province's heritage, and I'm glad the member from Cambridge has embraced these values.

Heritage Week in Ontario started on Monday and will go until Sunday, February 22. Throughout communities across this great province, there will be many different events, so I encourage all members to get out there and support their communities as they celebrate the heritage here in the province of Ontario.

I know the MPP from Kingston and the Islands attended a great event this week to kick off Ontario Heritage Week. The event took place at the Ryerson athletics centre, which we know is a historical site where the Toronto Maple Leafs won eight Stanley Cups. I hope all members have the opportunity to celebrate this amazing week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Minister. I know that each year there's a theme chosen to celebrate Ontario's Heritage Week.

When I was president of ACO, one year we asked the Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee and city council to designate the Shade Street arena in Cambridge under part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. Not only was it the oldest operating arena in North America; it was beautifully built in 1922 with yellow brick and a roof full of skylights to allow in the natural light. One of the reasons it was designated was its culturally significant history. Hockey player Bobby Hull played in this arena,

and Toller Cranston, the famed figure skater, made his name while he skated in the Shade Street arena. The citizens in my riding of Cambridge are very proud of our sports heritage.

Could the minister please tell the members of this House about the theme for this year's Ontario Heritage Week?

Hon. Michael Coteau: Again, I'd like to thank the member from Cambridge for her question. The theme for this year's Heritage Week is "Play. Endure. Inspire. Ontario's Sport Heritage." It's a celebration of our athletic past here in the province of Ontario. It's a reminder of our sport legacy, which has enriched our province and has provided inspiration to countless Ontario athletes. It's given us a very strong foundation from which to grow and develop sport and athleticism here in Ontario.

This year's theme is especially fitting because, as we know, in four and a half months we will have the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games, which will take place in the GTA and throughout the province of Ontario. Our athletes will be in the spotlight this summer, and I know that they'll build Ontario's strong sport heritage and also make some history of their own.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, the report from Elections Ontario is not ambivalent; it is clear. There is an apparent breach of the rules. They have broken the law according to the Chief Electoral Officer. They have broken the law.

Premier, you have claimed to be a leader. I ask you to show some of that leadership. You talked about always acting in the best interests of Ontarians with a commitment to transparency, to openness and to accountability. Show that you are accountable and cut Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed loose, at least until the time that this investigation is complete, the Attorney General has completed their investigation and the OPP have completed theirs.

Show some leadership and have these people step aside so that the people across this province can believe there is some integrity left in this government.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just once again read what the Chief Electoral Officer has said: "To form an opinion that conduct amounts to an 'apparent contravention' as set out in S. 4.0.2 of the Election Act, I must be satisfied, based on the evidence obtained in my investigation, that there is a *prima facie* case of a contravention.

"This means I must be aware of sufficient facts that, if proven correct, would constitute a contravention of the Election Act or the Election Finances Act."

1110

He goes on to say, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

That is what the Chief Electoral Officer has said, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, leadership is not by demonstrating how long you can stonewall. Leadership is about doing the right thing, even if it hurts, even if it's an admission that something wasn't right on your part.

I guess we could ask: Are you protecting Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed because they were working under your direct orders? Did they make those offers under your direct orders? Or will you do the right thing, respect the report from the Chief Electoral Officer and send these people into the penalty box? At the very least, if you're not going to fire them outright, put them in the penalty box until this matter can be cleared up. On behalf of the people of Ontario, I ask you: Do the right thing.

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, let me try this one more time. I'm quoting from the Chief Electoral Officer. He said, "I am neither"—

Interjections.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Listen: "I am neither"—

Interjections.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Okay, don't listen. "I am neither deciding to prosecute"—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Finish, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Chief Electoral Officer writes: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence." That is clearly what the Chief Electoral Officer has said.

Speaker, the people of Sudbury have made a decision. The opposition is not happy with that decision, but I think at least they need to respect that decision. The new member for Sudbury has been a very strong advocate and championing the causes that matter to the people—

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Pat Sorbara is the Premier's deputy chief of staff. Right now, she is on the public payroll, and she's making decisions that affect Ontarians from one end of this province to the other.

Today, the Chief Electoral Officer said, "I am of the opinion that the actions of Gerry Lougheed Jr. and Patricia Sorbara amount to apparent contraventions of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act"

Apparent: obvious; certain; very, very visually clear. That's what "apparent" means. So I ask the Premier—

Interjections.

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

My attempt to have everyone put questions and answers in silence applies to everybody.

Please, Leader.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Will the Premier do the right thing and ask, or have, Pat Sorbara step aside from her position?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It's hard to believe that I have to do this one more time, but I'm going to do this one more time.

The Chief Electoral Officer wrote: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence."

I think the members of the opposition need to actually read what the Chief Electoral Officer said and respect the process.

The Premier has said repeatedly that we will fully cooperate with any investigations under way in this matter, as we have always done.

I do think it's important to remind the members opposite—and I know this isn't easy—but they had an MPP step aside after five months, and they lost a seat. The people of Sudbury were sick and tired of the negativity. They appreciated the positive campaign—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. It was actually my supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, back to the Premier: What's really hard to believe is that the Chief Electoral Officer actually says that they have never "conducted a regulatory investigation into allegations of bribery or ever reported an apparent contravention of the home statutes" of his office to the Attorney General. That's what's actually really hard to believe: that that's actually happening for the first time in Ontario under the watch of this government because of the actions that they've taken.

I talked about Pat Sorbara. Now I want to ask about Gerry Lougheed, who is actually in a position of trust, Speaker, as the head of a police services board that's supposed to be upholding the laws of Ontario. This report says that he has actually broken the laws of Ontario. So my question to the Premier is, when is she going to call for Gerry Lougheed to step aside from the position of head of the police services board in Sudbury?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I think that the Chief Electoral Officer, in his report, in his letter, at page 4, specified very clearly that they have developed a new protocol that was not in existence when they were in power. It's a new protocol: "In this protocol, any potential for placing the Attorney General in a personal conflict of interest is eliminated because the report of an

apparent contravention is made by my office directly to the Deputy Attorney General of Ontario."

Like I said earlier, I was informed that the matter is being dealt with by an independent prosecution service, not by the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I apologize to the leader of the third party for missing her supplementary.

New question.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure regarding the Rouge park in my riding and parts of Markham. Provincial governments of all stripes have upheld strong environmental standards for the benefit of the Rouge ever since Premier David Peterson announced that these lands would be protected. Unfortunately, the weak legislation put forward by the federal government to establish a national Rouge park fails to protect the environmental integrity of the Rouge.

As a long-time supporter of the Rouge, I've been following this controversial Bill C-40 at the federal level, the Rouge National Urban Park Act, with interest and concern. It appears that the federal Conservatives have blown a great opportunity to create a national Rouge park. Mr. Speaker, would the minister provide this House with an update regarding Bill C-40 and how, in its current form, it is failing Ontarians and the environment?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for that question. I want to thank him for his passion for saving the Rouge. He and I have been involved together for over 25 years in efforts to protect and preserve this valuable piece of land. Unfortunately, the federal government has refused to adopt any recommendations from Ontario residents or environmental groups that would strengthen environmental integrity requirements with this bill. It's incredibly disappointing that the bill passed through the House of Commons in its original weak state.

This bill, as it stands, simply fails to protect the environmental integrity of the Rouge and all the lands that surround it—and that's not acceptable. As a result, this minister and this government will not, in good faith, transfer provincially owned lands to federal ownership. Our government and I are calling on the Senate to work with the environmental groups—those who founded the Rouge in the first place and fought for it—to refer the bill back to the House of Commons and allow the bill to be strengthened appropriately.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I would like to thank the minister for this update.

I'm proud to be part of a government that will not allow weaker laws to govern this important natural landscape in my riding. My constituents will be extremely glad to know that our government is championing the need to protect the environmental integrity of the

Rouge. We have an obligation to assure that the Rouge is protected for future generations to experience and enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, some of my constituents have been hearing incorrect information from the federal Conservatives regarding our government's stance towards agriculture on these important lands. Can the minister please educate the House on our government's position towards agricultural lands within the park?

1120

Hon. Brad Duguid: Again, I want to thank the member for his passion for these lands.

Let's be clear: Our government has always supported agriculture uses as a proposed use in the park. I've met with several farming groups and representatives of the agriculture community there, to reassure them that our government has long accepted and supported agriculture as a continuing use in the park.

Our environmental partners, for the most part, have also been clear that they support agriculture uses in the proposed park, and welcome farmers as important partners in conservation. Together, we can make the Rouge a model for sustainable agricultural practices.

Again, I repeat that we urge the Senate to work with the environmental groups when Bill C-40 is referred to a Senate committee, and send the legislation back to the House of Commons to allow it to be strengthened so that the views of those environmentalists that founded the park and the views of our agricultural stakeholders can be taken into consideration.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to again read into the record a fact that was presented by the Chief Electoral Officer today in his report.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To which ministry, please?

Mr. Steve Clark: To the Premier.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Obviously, it's to the Premier.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Not obviously.

Mr. Steve Clark: The quote is: "no Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario has ever conducted a regulatory investigation into allegations of bribery or ever reported an apparent contravention of the home statutes of my office to the Attorney General."

This is a historic day for the province of Ontario.

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: The truth hurts, Minister. The truth hurts.

Speaker, Mr. Bisson, for the NDP, and I both wrote to the Chief Electoral Officer. The OPP are involved. The Civilian Police Commission is involved. The Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner is involved.

When are you going to—

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

Interjection.

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

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the member for Trinity-Spadina, the Minister of Labour and the deputy House leader—who is now warned—the rest of you will come to order.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, if it weren't too late for Academy Award nominations, I would be nominating the members opposite for their feigned indignation.

The reality is that both opposition parties have had conversations with potential candidates, with past candidates, about how to continue to stay involved, how to continue to make a positive contribution.

We need look no further than the member from Kawartha Lakes-Brock. She herself conceded that it's a very delicate issue—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member has conceded that it is a very delicate issue, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin-Caledon is warned. The member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. Of course, it isn't just the PCs who have had those conversations. The NDP has as well. We need think no further back than 2013 and the Scarborough-Guildwood nomination, where a long-standing party member was railroaded by Adam Giambone out of the nomination, Speaker—

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

Mr. Steve Clark: My question, going back to the Premier—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: Well, you know what? There are a few Academy Awards performances going on there.

Listen, I'm going to ask a very simple question. This is a government under three OPP investigations. The Chief Electoral Officer has presented his report on his investigation. We've got other officers of the Legislature, we've got other commissions, that are investigating this government.

My question is simple: Premier, will you agree with me that we should reconstitute the justice committee, have these people attend the meeting—and let's discuss these investigations and get a full report to MPPs in this Legislature.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I hate to go back, but I'm going to. This is an article by Richard Brennan in the Toronto Star: "Tempers flared Saturday when NDP provincial council blocked an investigation into a July Scarborough-Guildwood nomination won by former Toronto councillor Adam Giambone.

"You are all cowards," said 90-year-old Joy Taylor, who along with other riding executive members has

maintained that several ineligible members were allowed to vote, giving the two-person race to Giambrone, a last-minute entry.” A call for an independent probe into the results was ruled out of order.

“I am very disappointed,” the president of the riding association told the Star.

So Amarjeet Kaur Chhabra, a young woman who immigrated from India and overcame childhood polio to run for the nomination, was railroaded by the—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. There are times where even I have to correct my record. I apologize to the member from Trinity–Spadina. It was actually Beaches–East York.

New question, the leader of the official opposition.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Premier, in essence, the rule of law—

Interjections.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry. I apologize again.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I mean, I know you don’t like hearing from me, Speaker, but you’re giving me a complex.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I’m hoping that’s said in jest.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It was.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Sorry about that. New question, the leader of the third party.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Chief Electoral Officer says, “I am of the opinion that the actions of Gerry Lougheed Jr. and Patricia Sorbara amount to apparent contraventions of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act.”

My question to the Premier is, who is responsible for giving Pat Sorbara her instructions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The people of Sudbury made a decision to actually send a Liberal to Queen’s Park, a Liberal who represented their riding. He was the only candidate who presented a positive platform, a positive campaign, and we are delighted that he is here making that positive contribution.

Here’s why I believe the people of Sudbury changed their minds and chose to send a Liberal to Queen’s Park. The NDP has twice rejected a budget that contained many progressive initiatives, including an increase to the Ontario Child Benefit. They said no not once but twice. They said no to families caring for people with developmental disabilities not once but twice. They said no to personal support workers who had an increase to—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Elections Ontario says—the Chief Electoral Officer says, “I’m of the opinion that the

actions of Gerry Lougheed Jr. and Patricia Sorbara amount to apparent contraventions of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act.” Who is responsible for giving Gerry Lougheed his instructions, Speaker?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Again, let’s look at what the NDP, who seem to have left their values somewhere else, rejected not once but twice. They said no to 56,000 children who need an investment in the Student Nutrition Program. They said no to workers who deserve a fair minimum wage. They said no to aboriginal communities who benefit from the Remote Communities Allowance and the Aboriginal Economic Development Fund. They said no to people struggling with homelessness who need enhanced funding of the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. They said no to people who rely on social assistance rates and were hoping for an increase. They said no to people living in poverty who will rely on a new Local Poverty Reduction Fund. They said no to workers and future retirees who will save for retirement with a made-in-Ontario pension plan. They said no to families who are counting on child care modifications—

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

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. Ontario’s senior citizen population is projected to double from 2012 to 2036, and I am one of those people. I know the government has committed to better serving this community by delivering strong health services, creating the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and working in collaboration with various stakeholder organizations.

1130

Speaking to my constituents, I hear frequent concerns regarding the senior community and their consumer protection. Media coverage has described multiple scenarios involving seniors being taken advantage of by businesses and unscrupulous organizations.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All right. That’s just about enough.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Many constituents are concerned about their loved ones—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Question?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: —and relatives who may not be familiar with modern industry trends and sales tactics, making these seniors vulnerable to exploitation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. You had your time.

Minister?

Hon. David Orazietti: Thank you, Speaker. I want to first thank the hard-working member from Barrie for this important question. I’m pleased to discuss our government’s efforts to protect Ontario consumers, particularly vulnerable groups like seniors, who can be victimized by unfair business practices.

Our government is committed to helping seniors by providing them with protection on their transactions. In particular, Bill 55, the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, was passed to protect vulnerable Ontarians against abusive and predatory practices of some companies. The act requires clarity in contracts and mandates cooling-off periods on certain transactions, specifically door-to-door sales, which often target our seniors.

With the constantly changing marketplace, it's also important that seniors know their rights. We have an active consumer awareness team to inform, educate and empower Ontarians. The consumer awareness workshops, active living fairs and trade shows that occur throughout Ontario, with the support of our ministry, help seniors learn about industry trends and how their families can stay protected.

We're going to focus on effective legislation and far-reaching consumer protection programs—

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

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My thanks to the minister for his response and for his efforts in improving consumer protection for Ontario seniors. I've heard positive feedback from various constituents about the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services awareness campaigns and applaud any measures that encourage Ontario consumers to ask the right questions. I understand that certain sectors can be especially difficult for our older community to navigate.

Can the Minister of Government and Consumer Services speak about what he sees as the most pressing concerns for senior consumers and how he plans to address them?

Hon. David Orazietti: I want to thank my colleague from Barrie for her advocacy for seniors in her riding.

I'm pleased to address a couple of major concerns for seniors that have been detailed in the media lately. First of all, we're working to protect seniors as they monitor their finances. In certain cases, widows and widowers must manage their finances for the first time after relying heavily on a spouse for years. We help seniors from being taken advantage of in these situations by requiring clarity in contracts and implementing a 10-day cooling-off period.

We've also noted that many seniors are moving to condominiums; they need less space than they once did. We're working with this community by reforming the Condominium Act for the first time in 15 years, so that seniors on fixed incomes are not left without options with respect to mandatory qualifications for condo managers and affordable dispute resolution mechanisms. These improvements will protect the growing number of condodwelling seniors.

Also, we're continuing to identify, on the Ontario Consumer Beware List, important issues that impact our seniors, and I look forward to continuing—

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, the Chief Electoral Officer, in doing his duty today, is essentially asking that the Attorney General get this matter before a court of law, which is her and her ministry's responsibility. It's not the Chief Electoral Officer's job, as you know or ought to know, to try this matter. He has no authority to do that, nor can he convict or acquit. He can only recommend, which he has done today, and point out that the Attorney General bring this matter forward. He's done his duty today by pointing out the wrong that has been done.

It's your government's job to get this matter to the ultimate judgment of a court, so I ask you today, will you direct your Attorney General to expedite this matter and put it before a judge as soon as possible?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the analysis of the Leader of the Opposition, and I know the Attorney General will want to comment in the supplementary.

I just want to be clear, because there are a couple of things that he said that I think are not exactly what the Chief Electoral Officer said. Just to remind everyone of what he said: "To form an opinion that conduct amounts to an 'apparent contravention' as set out in s. 4.0.2 of the Election Act, I must be satisfied, based on the evidence obtained in my investigation, that there is a *prima facie* case of a contravention.

"This means I must be aware of sufficient facts that, if proven correct, would constitute a contravention of the Election Act or the Election Finances Act."

He goes on to say, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." And so it is absolutely the case that he has passed that on to the Attorney General.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: I didn't really hear an answer. You're laying out a process, as you guys so often do. The fact of the matter is, it's time for this matter to be put before a judge. Only the Attorney General can do that. I am asking you to direct her—not her directly, but her ministry, which is in your authority—to expedite this matter. Let's settle it once and for all. These people deserve their day in court. By not allowing it to go to court and settling this matter, you're not only dragging down your office, you're saying the OPP are wrong to investigate this matter. Now you're saying the Chief Electoral Officer is wrong. You're saying the opposition is wrong. You're saying the media is wrong. You're saying the people of Ontario are wrong. Well, ma'am, you are wrong. You're delusional in this case. Do the right thing: Fire the people, apologize, and get it before a court.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned previously on numerous occasions, this process exclusively involves non-partisan officials within the Ministry of the Attorney General. No political staff, including myself or members of my political office, have anything to do with this process. It's the chief prosecutor's office that deals with this process, and I find it very offensive that a member of the third party knows exactly that and continues to let the public believe that we direct prosecution from my office. It's very clear in the letter from the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Speaker.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's to the Premier. To maintain the public trust in the administration of justice, Speaker, if something looks like a conflict, it is in the interest of justice to remove that perception. That's why the Liberal government appointed an independent prosecutor when Michael Bryant was facing charges.

Will the Premier do the right thing in this case, do the same thing that the Liberals did when a Liberal cabinet minister was facing an investigation, and appoint an independent prosecutor today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Mr. Speaker, I said it twice already in this House: This matter is being dealt with by an independent prosecution service and it has already been sent this week some time to the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. It's the third time I've said it. I hope that you will respect the process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, when Michael Bryant, a former Liberal cabinet minister, was under investigation, there was a prosecutor from outside of Ontario in charge of that investigation. That was the right thing to do. This whole perception of justice not being done has to be removed from this process so that the public trust can be upheld. That is the bottom line.

Now, today, the Chief Electoral Officer said that one of the Premier's closest advisers, her deputy chief of staff and campaign director has, in his opinion, broken the Election Act. Now it's time for the prosecution of that accusation.

Will the Premier do the right thing and appoint an independent prosecutor from outside of Ontario right now, today?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, Mr. Speaker, nobody has been charged, and I repeat for the fourth time that this matter is being dealt with by an independent prosecution service. It's being dealt with by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada—not Ontario, Canada.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Timmins–James Bay, come to order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You've never seen the deputy? You've never met the deputy?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to recognize the member, but before I do, the member from Timmins–James Bay was still talking while I warned him.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, I apologize, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener Centre.

SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILDREN

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, for young people who have special needs, whether it's difficulty speaking or mobility issues that stop them from getting around, the proper care can help them lead a more fulfilling and independent life.

I've heard from constituents in my riding of Kitchener Centre about their needs for community-tailored programming. We have a wonderful example of this in my riding of Kitchener Centre at the KidsAbility facility that opened in June 2011. Kids and parents now have access to therapy space and a large double gymnasium.

Minister, can you please inform the members of this House what you are doing to improve services for children and youth who have special needs?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Kitchener Centre for an important question and for being at the event with me last week at the KidsAbility Centre.

Our Special Needs Strategy is focused on supporting children and youth with special needs to get timely and effective services through early identification, coordinating services and making rehabilitation services more seamless from birth right through to school years. When I was parliamentary assistant to this ministry, I travelled throughout the province and heard from families, researchers and service providers on this strategy, and it informed the work we're doing now.

Last year, we invested \$5 million a year to help children's treatment centres. I want to say that at this centre, KidsAbility, the money we have given them is to help core rehabilitation. But what is very, very exciting is that through an additional \$62,500 in one-time funding to reduce wait-lists, KidsAbility was able to completely eliminate assessment wait-lists through our funding. That means that when a family goes there—

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

VISITORS

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for indulging me. I just wanted to ask the members to recognize and welcome my daughter Abigail and my granddaughter Beatrice, who have just arrived from Shanghai, in the members' west gallery. Thank you.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to recognize Arnella Csongradi, who is joining us here from the beautiful riding of Don Valley East.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to acknowledge a delegation from MY Canada: Lia Milousis; Christian Helmond, from Lion's Head, Ontario; Kathleen Rogers, and Anthony Dube. They met with me, and I thank them for their interest in democracy.

ALEX BEDUZ

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I would hope all members of the House would help those of us here in the PC Party say goodbye to Mr. Alex Beduz, who has served very ably behind the chair there as our director of legislative affairs for many years.

He goes on to the Senate. No, he's not appointed to the Senate; he's going to work for the Senate. I'm sending him ahead of myself to clear the way for my appointment. He doesn't know that, but I've just told him.

Thank you, Alex, for your hard work and your dedication. We are really, really going to miss you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Soo Wong: I know they're coming through very shortly to the east gallery—the members and relatives of mine from the Wongs' Association of Ontario. As they celebrate Chinese New Year they'll be joining the Legislature this afternoon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome our guests, as always.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AFFAIRES FRANCOPHONES

M^{me} Gila Martow: Bonjour, monsieur le Président. Je suis la représentante pour les affaires francophones du caucus conservateur en opposition ici, et je veux faire un petit rapport.

J'ai visité une réunion sur les affaires alimentaires pour les femmes avec mon collègue libéral des Mille-Îles, son district. C'était vraiment quelque chose de très, très intéressant. C'était en Italie, ce mois de février.

Je veux aussi mentionner qu'il y aura une très grande réunion cet été en juillet à Berne, Suisse, pas seulement pour les femmes; c'est pour les hommes aussi, les députés qui représentent les pays francophones.

Aujourd'hui, comme on a entendu, tout le monde porte des rubans rouges. On veut donner des félicitations de la nouvelle année à tous nos visiteurs chinois, et on a des vietnamiens qui parlent français vraiment. Je veux dire, en chinois, Gong Hay Fat Choy. On a beaucoup de célébrations aujourd'hui en Ontario et même à Thornhill, mon district.

Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président. J'espère qu'on pourra parler beaucoup de français ici à la législature de l'Ontario.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR THE DISABLED

Ms. Cindy Forster: This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, mandating that our province be fully accessible by

2025. Last week, an independent report revealed that Trinity College Provost Mayo Moran confirmed that at this government's rate, we're nowhere near reaching that target. The report reiterates what accessibility advocates, the AODA Alliance and supporters have been flagging for four years, confirming that in the last 10 years, 1.8 million affected Ontarians who face barriers have not seen any significant improvement to services or access.

Moran's report also echoes that OSSTF, OECTA and EFTO call for the need to develop specific standards in the areas of education, health and residential housing. The Minister of Economic Development, Infrastructure and Employment responded, claiming, "We're already moving on some of these recommendations." I challenge this government to disclose what, when and how. If it was that serious about these recommendations and the report, it should have made the report accessible to start with when they first released it.

This report is a wake-up call to the government's leadership to stop dithering and to commit to making accessibility a priority by developing the standards and ensuring we're not just paying lip service to those people who need it most.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mrs. Cristina Martins: In December I visited the Perth Avenue co-op, a great housing facility in my riding of Davenport. I met with residents of this vibrant community and had a round-table discussion around affordable housing.

An issue that came up was the end of the federal government's operating agreements with co-operatives and other housing providers. When these agreements conclude, nearly 200,000 Canadian households depending on rent-gearied-to-income housing assistance will be left out in the cold. Almost half of these are households in Ontario.

The vast majority of these agreements, including the contract with Perth Avenue, will expire in 2020. The federal funding necessary to avert this crisis is modest. The Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada estimates that only \$6 million over the next five years is required to maintain these co-op homes. Despite this, the federal government has been silent on this issue and has sat idly by as a number of these vital operating agreements have already expired.

I have already spoken to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing about this important issue and have urged the Prime Minister to take action. I want to lend my voice to this issue once more. Our federal partners need to make a commitment to continue providing these absolutely critical funds, and this commitment needs to happen now.

CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL AUTOSHOW

Mr. Michael Harris: As temperatures hit new lows, I encourage snow-weary Ontarians to get out of the cold

and into a car at the 42nd annual Canadian International AutoShow.

The Trillium Automotive Dealers Association has put together another world-class show, bringing more dynamic, interactive content than ever before, along with the stunning display of over 1,000 cars and trucks ready to roll.

The Canadian International AutoShow has a well-earned reputation as not only the most impressive but also the largest consumer show of any kind in Canada, with over 300,000 taking part in the annual tribute to metal and wheels.

Get up close and personal with the latest models, look to future concepts or gaze into history with priceless classics on display. With more than 125 exhibitors and 40 automotive brands represented, there's a little something for everyone.

This year's theme, "Life Is in Motion," is about the way that we live now—connected at all times, technologically in sync with not just our mobile devices and one another but with our vehicles as well.

While TADA is fuelling our dreams, they're also raising money for Prostate Cancer Canada with the Rock the Road Raffle, which will see one lucky visitor drive off in a 50th-anniversary-edition Mustang GT Coupe with \$22,000 in custom modifications.

So bundle up the family and head down to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre for a show that will get your motor running while raising money for an important cause.

FIREFIGHTERS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Firefighters provide an invaluable service to our communities. As first responders, they keep us safe, they give us peace of mind and they risk their lives in the service of others. In return, it is the government's responsibility to ensure that they are not unnecessarily put at risk.

This afternoon, I will be sending a letter to the Liberal government about a tragic loss we experienced in our community in Durham earlier this month. On February 8, Adam Brunt, a firefighter hopeful from Bowmanville, tragically lost his life during a cold water training exercise in Hanover. This was an accident—one that is currently under investigation—but there are many disturbing questions that must be answered about the lack of safety in the private safety training industry in Ontario.

Private pre-training service courses, such as the one Adam was taking, are not regulated in our province. Sadly, Adam's loss is not an isolated incident in an industry in desperate need of regulation. Though these courses are technically optional, students are encouraged to take them to be competitive and hopefully get a job.

The government has spoken at length about the importance of protecting our first responders, yet that same support isn't afforded to them as students. Instead, students are put in an environment where proper use of

equipment and even the use of proper equipment isn't regulated.

I call on the government to take immediate action and commit to regulating the private safety training industry for firefighters. Firefighters dedicate their lives to keeping us safe, and now it is our turn to return the favour.

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Mr. Han Dong: I rise today to share the happiness of the celebration of the lunar new year, the Year of the Goat. Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean communities in Ontario will be celebrating across the province today.

Chinese New Year is a celebration of Chinese heritage and culture, two things that are particularly interesting to me and many in my riding of Trinity-Spadina. The lunar new year is the most important holiday for the Chinese community.

It's unclear when the exact beginning of the new year celebration in China was. Normally, it's said to start from the year-end religious ceremony during the Shang dynasty, 1766 BC to 1122 BC, but, interestingly, it was actually the Han dynasty—same spelling as my first name as you notice—206 BC to 220 AD, that established the official day of the Chinese New Year.

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According to tales and legends, the beginning of the Chinese New Year started with the fight against the mythical beast called "Year," or in Chinese, "Nian." Nian looks like an ox with a lion's head and inhabits the sea. At the night of New Year's Eve, the "Year" or the Nian will come out to harm people, animals and properties. Later, people found that the "Year" fears the colour red, fire and loud sounds—therefore, firecrackers.

I want to invite everyone to celebrate the Chinese New Year, the lunar new year, across the province.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want to talk about the implementation of the new social assistance management system that occurred in November of last year. As it turns out, the new program, which cost \$240 million, never worked. This computer snafu went from being called a minor glitch to a very serious problem in 24 hours.

Confidential ministry documents show that problems were identified in October 2013, and its implementation was delayed in March and again in July 2014. The government always knew there were problems. It's obvious that they weren't fixed, and they went ahead with the program anyway.

Now the program requires an additional \$16 million and a third-party adviser to tell us what front-line workers have been saying for months: that SAMS—the acronym for the system—does not work. This money could have paid for a lot of food, heat, hydro, dental appointments and housing for our most vulnerable citizens.

The ministry may choose to point the finger at the front-line staff, but it's a system that is broken. A process that used to take 21 days to turn around now takes months. I've heard of cases where it has taken four hours to update just an address change into the system because it keeps rejecting it.

Front-line case workers now are so burdened by the system, they're unable to meet with constituents, take calls, complete paperwork and get the cheques out on time. Municipalities where they manage Ontario Works have tried to step up to the plate, but the ministry needs to resolve the problem as soon as possible to support our most vulnerable citizens.

WONG ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the Wong Association of Ontario. This morning, I had the pleasure of joining the Wong Kung Har Wun Sun Association, also known as the Wong Association of Ontario, to celebrate the unveiling of a plaque from Heritage Toronto.

The Wong Association has played an important part in the history of Toronto and Chinatown since its foundation in 1912, making it one of the oldest Chinese family associations in Canada. Wongs have actually been in Canada since before Confederation.

The journey to Canada was not an easy one for many Chinese Canadians, who faced discrimination through the Chinese Exclusion Act and many hardships upon their arrival. Chinese family groups like the Wong Association were essential in helping new Chinese immigrants adjust to life in Toronto.

My own family also benefited by the support from the Wong Association. I recall my mother taking both my siblings and me to the Wong Association every weekend for settlement support.

In 2011, the Wong Association was honoured by the Governor General of Canada with their own family crest in recognition of their "indelible contribution to the development of our nation" made by the Wongs for over the last 150 years.

I want to thank the Wong Association of Ontario for inviting me to be a part of the ceremony this morning and for joining us in the Legislature this afternoon. I wish everyone celebrating Lunar New Year happiness and prosperity. Gong Hay Fat Choy. Gong Xi Fa Cai. Xin Nian Kuai Le.

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak about Carleton University in my hometown of Ottawa and to recognize Dr. Runte and all the leaders here from Carleton today. I look forward to meeting them later on this afternoon.

In our highly competitive and increasingly knowledge-based economy, the skills that students are learning at

Carleton will help them take their place among the best and the brightest that our province has to offer.

I'm proud to say that two of our children—Kirsten, my daughter, and our son James—are both graduates of Carleton, and my father worked at Carleton 40 years ago. If none of you have been to Carleton University, it's a beautiful campus that has grown over 40 years, bounded by the Rideau River and the canal. It's really quite spectacular.

Carleton also has a long-standing reputation as a university that promotes research excellence and enjoys many partnerships around the world. It has built a well-deserved reputation as a leader in areas as diverse as public affairs, journalism, engineering, high technology and international studies.

We have a number of graduates from Carleton in this Legislature. I know that the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services, the Minister of Tourism, the government House leader and the member from Eglinton-Lawrence are all graduates of Carleton University. Having said that, I would invite you all to room 228 between 5 and 7 tonight to enjoy their hospitality and get a chance to let Carleton display the kind of great institution that it is.

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

PETITIONS

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here presented to me by a great number of people in the riding.

"Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and quality of life for future generations;

"Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which have significant human and financial costs;

"Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents' physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

"Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers is detrimental;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To implement a moratorium in Oxford county, Ontario, on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full and comprehensive review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

"That this review of alternatives would give particular emphasis to (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can be practically and efficiently recycled or reused so as to not require disposal."

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present this petition. I attach my signature, as I agree with it.

AIR-RAIL LINK

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

"Whereas there is widespread agreement that a rail link connecting Union Station and Pearson airport is needed;

"Whereas the plan to run diesel trains on this route is bad for our health and the health of our planet;

"Whereas electric trains would be better for our health and the health of our planet;

"Whereas electric trains would allow for more stops along the route and greater access to desperately needed transit in the GTA;

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

"That the province of Ontario commit to the electrification of the Union Pearson Express and make a firm commitment now to the health of our communities, the health of our planet, and to Toronto's transit network."

I couldn't agree more, and I'm going to give it to Fardin to be delivered to the table.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

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

"Whereas Ontario is a province of immigrants, representing over 200 countries and speaking more than 130 languages; and

"Whereas Ontario is the primary destination for newcomers to Ontario, receiving more immigrants than the combined total of most of Canada's provinces and territories; and

"Whereas Ontario is dependent on skilled immigrant labour to fill jobs, 2.5 million of which are estimated to be created in the next 10 years; and

"Whereas a stronger immigration partnership with the federal government will allow Ontario to work with employers and communities to assess labour force needs and bring in highly-skilled workers;

"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 49, the Ontario Immigration Act, 2014."

I fully support the petition, and I'll give my petition to page Natalie.

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TAXATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: "Stop the Carbon Tax" 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 unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

"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."

This is signed by hundreds of people from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I'll hand this over to page Inaya.

FOREST INDUSTRY

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

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is responsible for the governance and management of forestry;

"Whereas Resolute Forest Products holds 44% of the sustainable forest licence in the Abitibi forest;

"Whereas Resolute Forest Products have announced their intent to give up their wood rights;

"Whereas the sustainable forest licence is a critical element in the marketability for economic development in the town of Iroquois Falls to potential business interests;

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

"Appeal to the Ministry of Natural Resources to institute a moratorium on the transfer of the SFL for the wood rights being abandoned by Resolute Forest Products in the Abitibi River forest ... to ensure that new entrants into the marketplace are able to apply for the SFL."

I wholeheartedly agree, attach my signature and send it down with Niko.

DISTRACTED DRIVING

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is for the Making Ontario's Roads Safer act.

"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 will add my name to the petition and give it to William of Kitchener Centre.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here that was presented to me by Bryan Smith. Bryan is the chair of the OPAL group, which is Oxford People Against the Landfill. He has been gathering them around the riding for some time now, and they keep coming in. I think by now we have enough signatures to cover the total number of people within my riding.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the purpose of Ontario's Environmental Protection Act (EPA) is to 'provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.' RSO 1990...; and

"Whereas 'all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local ecosystem.'—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

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

"That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario."

Thank you very much for allowing me to present this petition on behalf of Bryan Smith.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from Madame Fleurette Rioux. She is from my riding, in Chelmsford. It reads as follows:

"Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

"Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

"Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas-price regulation; and

"Whereas jurisdictions with gas-price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Amber to bring it to the Clerk.

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Mr. Arthur Potts: Gong Hay Fat Choy, Speaker. I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas some establishments have" established "unfair tipping practices in which a portion of tips and gratuities are being deducted and kept by owners; and

"Whereas employees in establishments where tipping is a standard practice, such as restaurants, bars and hair salons, supplement their income with tips and gratuities and depend on those to maintain an adequate standard of living; and

"Whereas customers expect that when they leave a tip or a gratuity that the benefit will be going to the employees who directly contributed to that positive experience;

"Whereas most establishments do respect their employees and do not collect their tips and gratuities unfairly and thus are left at a disadvantage compared to those owners who" do;

"Whereas other jurisdictions in North America such as Quebec, New Brunswick and New York City have passed legislation to protect employees' tips;

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

"That all members of" the assembly "support Bill 12, the Protecting Employees' Tips Act, 2014, and help shield Ontario employees and businesses from operators with improper tipping practices while protecting accepted and standard practices such as tip pooling among employees."

I agree with this petition, will sign my name to it and leave it with page Eileen.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have received more petitions with regard to winter road maintenance from Dean's Home Hardware in Port Sydney. The petition reads:

"Petition in Support of Improved Winter Roads Maintenance."

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the area maintenance contract system has failed Ontario drivers the past two winters;

“Whereas unsafe conditions led to the maintenance contractor being fined in the winter of 2013-14, as well as leading to a special investigation by the provincial Auditor General;

“Whereas the managed outsourcing system for winter roads maintenance, where the private contractor is responsible for maintenance, but MTO patrols the region and directs the contractor on the deployment of vehicles, sand and salt, has a proven track record for removing snow and ensuring that Ontario’s highways are safe for travellers;

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

“That the Ontario Ministry of Transportation take immediate action to improve the maintenance of winter roads based on the positive benefits of the previous delivery model, where MTO plays more of a role in directing the private contractor.”

I support this petition and will sign it.

MISSING PERSONS

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

“Whereas Ontario does not have missing persons legislation; and

“Whereas police are not able to conduct a thorough investigation upon receipt of a missing person report where criminal activity is not considered the cause; and

“Whereas this impedes investigators in determining the status and possibly the location of missing persons; and

“Whereas this legislation exists and is effective in other provinces; and

“Whereas negotiating rights to safety that do not violate rights to privacy has been a challenge in establishing missing persons law;

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

“We ask that the Attorney General’s office work with the office of the privacy commissioner to implement missing persons legislation that grants investigators the opportunity to apply for permissions to access information that will assist in determining the safety or whereabouts of missing persons for whom criminal activity is not considered the cause.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature and give this petition to page Victoria.

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WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, which I’d like to read as follows:

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

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

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the #1 recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

Speaker, I’m pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Muntder to carry it for me.

Speaker, I’m pleased to sign and support this petition and to ask page Muntder to carry it for me.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

Ms. Laurie Scott: “Petition in Support of Improved Winter Roads Maintenance.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the area maintenance contract system has failed Ontario drivers the past two winters;

“Whereas unsafe conditions led to the maintenance contractor being fined in the winter of 2013-14, as well as leading to a special investigation by the provincial Auditor General;

“Whereas the managed outsourcing system for winter roads maintenance, where the private contractor is responsible for maintenance, but MTO patrols the region and directs the contractor on the deployment of vehicles, sand and salt, has a proven track record for removing snow and ensuring that Ontario’s highways are safe for travellers;

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

“That the Ontario Ministry of Transportation take immediate action to improve the maintenance of winter roads based on the positive benefits of the previous

delivery model, where MTO plays more of a role in directing the private contractor.”

This petition has been signed and is still continuing to be signed all through Haliburton county, and I thank the people for collecting the signatures, and I hand it to page Riley.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

PROTECTING INTERNS AND CREATING A LEARNING ECONOMY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DES STAGIAIRES ET LA CRÉATION D'UNE ÉCONOMIE D'APPRENTISSAGE

Ms. Sattler moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 64, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act and the Employment Standards Act, 2000 / Projet de loi 64, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le ministère de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités et la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm very pleased to rise today in this House, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to speak to Bill 64, the Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act.

Some of you will know that before I was elected, I was director of policy at a research firm that specialized in post-secondary education. Since my election, and in particular since taking on the critic role for training, colleges and universities, I've been given an opportunity that few policy researchers have been given before: a chance to put policy into practice, to draw on my own research, to inform legislative change and shape the public debate.

This private member's bill is based on findings from a research study I led for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario between 2010 and 2013, which involved surveys of more than 10,000 Ontario students, 3,600 faculty and a telephone survey of 3,300 randomly selected Ontario employers. As well as being evidence-based, my bill is also strongly supported by stakeholders across the post-secondary labour market and economic development sectors. I'm very proud to have had the support of those stakeholders in developing and refining this bill.

I want to particularly thank and recognize three of those stakeholders who joined me here this morning at a media conference: Claire Seaborn from the Canadian Intern Association, Naguib Gouda from Career Edge, and Peggy Jarvie from the University of Waterloo, the world's largest co-op provider, who joined me here this morning and Claire and Naguib are in the gallery to support my bill.

The purpose of Bill 64 is to expand high-quality work-integrated learning programs for post-secondary students and end the proliferation of exploitative, unpaid internships.

Work-integrated learning is the umbrella term for co-ops, internships, field placements, practicums and other kinds of work-experience programs that are offered at Ontario colleges and universities. They can be mandatory or voluntary, they can last a few days or up to a year, but the important thing is that they are integrated into a student's program of study and include a strong pedagogical component, enabling the student to critically reflect on his or her workplace experience.

By providing more opportunities for post-secondary students to gain relevant work experience while they are studying, my bill will help reduce unethical and often illegal unpaid internships that exploit graduates' desperation to get career-related experience after they finish school, and simply provide free labour for employers. Too many graduates feel that an unpaid internship is the only hope they have of getting a job in their field. They know that work experience matters and is perhaps the most important factor in determining whether they'll be able to get a job.

As Ontario continues to struggle from the recession, youth unemployment remains higher today than it was in 2007, and young people face significant barriers entering the labour market. One in five young people who are not working today has never held a job, and that includes increasing numbers of post-secondary graduates. This creates a vicious cycle of “can't get a job without experience and can't get experience without a job.”

To address this crisis, business organizations like the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Conference Board of Canada are leading the call for a much greater focus on post-secondary work-integrated learning programs. Last October, the chamber urged government, education providers and employers to work together to allow more students to reap the benefits of work-integrated learning. Progressive think tanks like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have made similar recommendations, urging much greater use of innovative work-integrated learning programs to address youth joblessness.

There are two parts to my bill. The first schedule is about college and university work-integrated learning programs, and the second schedule is about unpaid internships.

Schedule 1 brings together students, post-secondary institutions and employers, as well as stakeholders from the economic development and labour market sectors in a provincial advisory council on work-integrated learning.

The council's mandate is to make recommendations to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities on how to engage more employers in providing paid work-integrated learning experiences; how to improve oversight of unpaid work-integrated learning and better support post-secondary institutions to deliver quality work experiences; and how to ensure that qualified students are

able to access these programs across faculties and fields of study. By increasing the number of paid opportunities, students will be able to earn while they learn, helping to offset tuition fees that are higher in Ontario than in any other province.

Finally, the bill defines work-integrated learning and establishes criteria to ensure quality workplace programs. This is a response to concerns that are raised when students on placement are asked to do filing or similar menial tasks, work that does not provide any educational benefit to the student and simply offsets payroll costs for the employer.

Section 2 of my bill amends the Employment Standards Act to protect students in work-integrated learning programs and prevent illegal unpaid internships. Currently, the Employment Standards Act does not apply to secondary or post-secondary students who are doing work experience, and it also doesn't apply to individuals who are receiving training that meets six very narrow conditions. While the Premier and the Minister of Labour have said publicly that this is enough to prevent unpaid internships, unpaid interns know better. Too many employers are using the training exemption to avoid paying their interns, regardless of whether the conditions for exemption are met. Just take a look at Kijiji or Craigslist or Reddit, and you'll see hundreds of ads for unpaid positions.

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New Democrats strongly supported the legislation that was passed in the fall that brought these groups under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to allow students and trainees the right to refuse unsafe work. We believe, however, that more is needed to protect students in work-integrated learning programs.

Under my legislation, secondary and post-secondary work-experience students and trainees will be covered by basic Employment Standards Act protections, such as limits on hours of work, guaranteed breaks, leaves of absence and vacation days. They will continue to be exempt from the minimum wage provisions of the ESA, which is exactly the model that is in place right now in the Alberta Employment Standards Code.

In addition, my bill introduces new requirements to ensure that employers aren't illegally using unpaid interns to do the jobs of paid staff. Like many of you, I was shocked to learn last summer that a Ministry of Labour enforcement blitz found that 42% of employers with interns were not meeting their legal responsibilities under the Employment Standards Act.

My bill takes proactive measures to protect interns by requiring the publication of a poster about interns' rights to be posted conspicuously in Ontario workplaces, and requiring employers to provide written notice to both the intern and the ministry about conditions of work and whether the act applies. This will allow the collection of data on the extent of internships in Ontario, which is a huge gap in our knowledge and something we simply do not have access to right now.

Finally, the bill creates a clear and transparent system to allow anonymous and third party complaints about

contraventions of the act. Right now, we have unpaid interns who fear that if they report their employer for a violation of their rights under the Employment Standards Act, they will be blacklisted from ever being able to get into the career, which is why they were doing an unpaid internship in the first place.

Economists know that unpaid internships are bad for the economy. They privilege those who can afford to work for free, who have families who are able to financially support them. Employers who rely on unpaid interns as their talent pipeline risk losing out on an enormous pool of potential talent because they are excluding those who can't afford to work for free.

This legislation is critical to my riding of London West, a region that has been hard hit by the collapse of the manufacturing sector but is home to two of the largest and finest post-secondary institutions in Ontario: Western and Fanshawe. Our young people in London are bearing the brunt of the recession. There was an 11.2% decline in the proportion of youth who were employed in London between 2007 and 2014, a decrease greater than any other Ontario city.

We recognize that our economic success relies on our ability to attract and retain young talent, and there is no better retention strategy than making sure there are jobs for graduates after they complete their diploma or degree.

The evidence is clear. Local employers who invest in training paid co-op students or interns are very likely to offer employment after the work placement ends, which keeps jobs in our community. It connects young people to the employers and the workplaces where they've done their placements.

This week, the government launched a review of the Employment Standards Act and indicated that they were interested in knowing what kinds of changes need to be made to protect precarious workers. What better place to start than with unpaid interns who are perhaps among the most precarious and most vulnerable workers in our province?

It's time to end the exploitation of young people in illegal, unpaid internships. It's time to create a better system of oversight for students who are doing work placements through their post-secondary or secondary school of study, and it's time to give trainees and students the basic workplace protections that we all have and they deserve.

Ontario students need more opportunities to gain relevant workplace experience while they are studying so they don't feel compelled to take an unpaid internship after they graduate. This bill will make a huge difference for people in my riding of London West and across this province, and I urge all MPPs on all sides of the House to support this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I would like to thank the member from London West for bringing forward this bill and for her concerns around internship and the importance of experiential learning in Ontario. I'll be sharing my time with the member from Davenport.

As a previous employer, I understand the benefits of working with students, both in high school and in post-secondary. At Portobello Manor, I had the opportunity to work with a variety of students working towards becoming nurses, personal support workers, recreation leaders and even chefs. Because of this experience, I realized the importance of hands-on work in preparing students for their future careers.

As an employer, the responsibility of properly filling out paperwork, caring for the students' well-being and providing livable conditions was always important to ensure that interns and co-op students remained engaged, healthy and safe. This was not a burden when weighed against the benefits of mutual growth.

Our government is interested in taking a more in-depth look at this private member's bill presented by the member of London West. I am sure that we can all agree with the overall objective of protecting interns and creating more opportunities for experiential learning.

Je suis certaine que nous pouvons tous nous entendre sur le fait que tout travail mérite une compensation financière.

There is a narrow exemption in the Employment Standards Act for co-op students, trainees and the self-employed. This exemption is for accredited university and college programs to give their students valuable workplace experience while pursuing their degree. These rules have been in force for many years, and our government has been active in terms of increasing awareness.

J'ai toujours trouvé que pour mieux profiter des programmes d'alternance travail-études et de stages, il est nécessaire que l'employeur laisse la chance aux étudiants de vraiment vivre l'expérience pratique de leur travail. Il ne faut pas seulement leur donner les tâches subalternes, mais plutôt créer un environnement où le dialogue et l'exploration sont possibles. Ceci apportera le meilleur résultat pour l'étudiant ainsi que pour l'employeur.

With Ontario's youth unemployment and under-employment rates, it is important for our government and institutions to concentrate on work-integrated learning. The hands-on approach to education allows students to learn in the environment of their future career and to get acquainted with the realities and practice of their chosen field.

It is important not only to look at what needs improvement, but also to acknowledge the positive actions that have been taken.

In recent years, Ontario's universities and colleges have increasingly started offering a variety of experiential learning opportunities to combine traditional classroom teaching methods with hands-on collaborative activities. They have partnered with industry, professions and government to enhance students' post-secondary experience.

An innovative and exciting business which I had the pleasure to meet with a few months ago has demonstrated a serious desire to help the employees of the future.

GasTOPS, which stands for Gas Turbines and Other Propulsion Systems, works closely with Carleton University's aerospace engineering program and brings in around five students every year for co-ops. This helps train the next generation of high-calibre professionals in the field and allows students to gain real experience in their domain.

La Cité, située à Ottawa, sert aussi d'exemple en tant qu'établissement d'enseignement postsecondaire qui se préoccupe des carrières futures de ses étudiants. À La Cité, il y a deux types de stages à faire : les stages en milieu pratique et les stages en milieu coopératif. Ces stages offrent aux étudiants une précieuse expérience en milieu de travail.

Pour notre part, le gouvernement travaille étroitement avec le Conseil des universités de l'Ontario pour offrir de l'appui aux 40,000 étudiants en placement coop dans nos établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire.

We have also expanded the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant to cover the final year for students who are enrolled for five years due to co-op programs. This not only gives an additional \$1,780 in financial support, but also the incentive to take the time to develop practical skills while pursuing post-secondary education.

This expansion means that there can be more integration of students in the workplace and they will have a better understanding of their options after graduation.

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Another initiative of the government is the Productivity and Innovation Fund, which supports a number of projects that are redesigning courses to have more experimental learning opportunities for post-secondary students. We know that employers are not simply looking for candidates with credentials such as certificates and diplomas, but the ability to thrive in the hands-on work that is done.

En tant qu'adjointe parlementaire au ministre du Développement économique, je sais très bien que l'Ontario a besoin d'une main-d'œuvre hautement qualifiée pour réussir dans le contexte d'une économie de l'avenir. Avec la mise en oeuvre de plus de programmes d'apprentissage par l'excellence et avec la collaboration entre le gouvernement, les établissements d'enseignement postsecondaires et les industries, nous pouvons atteindre nos objectifs et ainsi créer un climat favorable afin de permettre une meilleure compréhension et une meilleure synergie entre les étudiants et la main-d'œuvre.

We're always open to hearing what we can do to protect our vulnerable workers, and look forward to debate on this bill.

Merci.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure to rise this afternoon and to add to the debate for Bill 64, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act and the Employment Standards Act, 2000.

A previous version of this bill was then known as Bill 172. It was introduced into the Legislature during the

previous session and was in fact the member from London West's first private member's bill.

Schedule 2 of the bill deals with the protection of interns and vulnerable workers, and this portion of the bill was introduced by the former member for Davenport in the last session as Bill 170.

It's incredibly important that we are discussing these sorts of issues right here in the Legislature.

With Ontario's economy reeling under the so-called steady hand of this Liberal government, which is currently embroiled in three ongoing OPP investigations, more and more young Ontarians are having difficulty entering the workforce, even with post-secondary education. My riding, Chatham-Kent-Essex, and the surrounding area have lost over 10,000 jobs in the past decade. We have been incredibly hard hit by the job losses that have been characteristic of this government's reign. But among the hardest hit by Ontario's fragile economy are our province's youth. More and more young Ontarians are pursuing college and university educations, and that is certainly a positive trend. However, youth unemployment remains troublingly high. We must ensure that young people of this province not only have an opportunity to attend post-secondary education, but are also ready to step into the workforce.

Right now, my Chatham constituency office is interviewing to have a co-op student from a high school in my riding who is interested in politics in order to give that student the experience that they need. We've never had a co-op student in the office before, but we were recently approached by the school due to the student's enthusiasm to gain expertise and experience. These sort of real-world learning opportunities are invaluable.

Prior to politics, Speaker, in my training and development company, I actually had several co-op students working with me to gain that valuable experience. It was always my goal for these students to leave feeling that they had made a difference and picked up real-world experience. I've actually given many motivational talks to co-op students in preparing them for the workforce from the perspective of an employer's point of view.

Just this week, St. Clair College down in my area hosted a private job fair at their main campus in Windsor for industrial mechanics students which featured 25 local employers. St. Clair College also has a beautiful campus in Chatham. The college has hosted these types of fairs for a number of years in an effort to help put their graduates into the workforce. This helps the school attract future students who look at the employment rates of graduates, and of course it makes a world of difference for students who are able to transition into a job more easily.

St. Clair College's chair of skilled trades, Rob Chittim, was quoted by Blackburn News just today about the initiative, and I quote: "We hear the negative all the time of the largest rate of unemployment in the country, here in Windsor, and the largest rate of unemployment for 18-to-30-plus-year-olds." He also said that 80% of St. Clair College's students in the pre-apprenticeship pro-

grams—clearly the college is offering an excellent program that is delivering results for its students.

However, not all work-integrated learning programs are created equal. All too often, we hear of the horror stories from students who claim their work activities are simply performing menial and unpaid routine tasks that do not add relevance or best practice experience for future employment.

Schedule 1 of Bill 64 addresses these concerns. By amending the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act to include a definition of "work-integrated learning," some structure will be added to the process.

The bill states, "(c) in the case of a co-operative education work term, a job description for the work term has been approved by the post-secondary institution, or, in the case of any other work placement, the work, the learning outcomes and the extent of supervision are agreed to in writing by the post-secondary institution, the employer and the participant before the work placement begins."

By requiring a college or university, the employer and students to essentially get it in writing ahead of time, it's more likely that all parties will receive true value from the work-integrated learning program.

The bill goes on to say, "(d) in the case of a co-operative education work term, the work is consistent with the approved job description, or, in the case of any other work placement, the work is consistent with the agreed learning outcomes."

This requirement will help to ensure that students are in fact given the opportunity—the learning opportunity—that they signed up for, instead of finding themselves performing work that is of little relevance to their area of study or their career ambitions.

Schedule 1 would also establish an advisory council on work-integrated learning that would report directly to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The mandate of this council is to advise the minister on issues regarding work-integrated learning in general.

While we're concerned that this council could simply become just another voice among the sea of advisory panels that are often ignored by this government, this panel has the opportunity to make post-secondary school education in Ontario stronger. It also has the potential to use taxpayer dollars with little end result or benefit. Unfortunately, there is no way to guarantee that the minister will actually listen.

The last thing we want to see is the creation of yet another report that collects dust on the shelf in a minister's office. The Liberal government has a rich history of completely ignoring reports or picking and choosing from recommendations based on, perhaps, political expediency. Their disregard for the Drummond report comes to mind, and surely the generation of that report must have cost the province's taxpayers a fair amount of money. We support the goal of the council, but our lack of confidence in this government has us concerned about its ultimate efficacy, or in other words, the ability to bring about change.

Another problem area that the bill seeks to address is the decentralized nature of information about work-integrated programs. Currently, employers who are interested in participating in work-integrated learning programs such as co-ops must contact individual institutions to see which programs are available. While this set-up works for many employers, it could certainly be more efficient.

Bill 64 also calls for the creation of a website for sharing information about available opportunities. Importantly, this would provide information regarding the supports and resources available to employers interested in participating in these programs.

Speaker, for many employers, cost is a deterrent for participating in work-integrated learning programs. If information is hard to find, one cannot expect a business to go out of its way to look for it. It's hard enough for businesses to keep their doors open in this province after over a decade of disastrous financial mismanagement by the Liberal government. We must make it easier, not harder, for interested businesses to participate in valuable work-integrated learning programs.

One of the other goals of this bill is to ensure that no student enrolled in a post-secondary program that includes a work-integrated learning program is denied the opportunity to take part. Essentially, the member for London West argues that if a student has the grades and meets the criteria, they should be able to benefit from work-integrated learning. This is a noble goal, but it may be more of an ideal goal rather than a practical one. More must be done to ensure our students are able to enter the workforce with job-ready experience, and aspiring to this goal will certainly help.

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In 2013, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance produced a policy paper addressing youth employment concerns. Now, Speaker, I've met with student representatives from this group on several occasions, as well as other student advocacy groups and other stakeholders, to discuss the challenges facing Ontario's youth as they step into a very rocky economy. One of their recommendations called for an anonymous reporting system whereby unpaid internships suspected to be in breach of regulations can be identified. Members of this House, and certainly members of the opposition, know the importance of whistle-blowers. Without the courage of whistle-blowers, we may have never learned about the Ornge air ambulance scandal.

One of the biggest concern about this issue goes beyond the scope of this bill. Our caucus is incredibly concerned over the lack of a jobs plan from this government. No matter how work-ready the youth of Ontario are, if there are no jobs for them to pursue after they graduate, it will be of little help. This government must recognize that our province is experiencing a jobs crisis and our youth are suffering because of it. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians are out of work today, and more must be done to get this province back to work.

Speaker, on the issue of unpaid internships, perhaps there could be something other than just paying these

students. Something could be done to help, perhaps, offset some of the costs that they incur. I'll give an example of one that comes to mind: perhaps providing them with transportation so they can get to and from, or letting them know about dress codes so they can buy nice suits, like the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport has.

Again, salaries sometimes come with problems. But you know what? For example, TAs earn between perhaps \$10,000 and \$15,000 a year. That was never intended to be a salary that they could live on. So perhaps what we need to do is find more ways to be more creative to compensate these students.

In conclusion, it's my sincere hope that more jobs will, in fact, start to be created here so that our best and brightest will no longer be forced to move to other provinces or states to find gainful employment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was a pleasure to address this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to start by saying how very, very proud I am to stand in support of the member for London West's private member's bill that will help end illegal unpaid internships and bring meaningful work-integrated learning opportunities to the young people of Ontario. I want to commend the tireless effort of the MPP for London West in this regard, as well as, in fact, one of our colleagues at the federal House, the member for the riding of Davenport, the MP named Andrew Cash. He has been working on some of these issues as well, and they have been making a fantastic team.

There are other folks who have been involved in this effort, Speaker, and I think it's important to acknowledge the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, the Canadian Federation of Students, and advocates, like Andrew Langille, who have been fighting to end the exploitation of vulnerable interns in this province.

The unfortunate thing is that the Premier really hasn't lifted a finger to fix this problem. Her Liberal government is failing miserably when it comes to supporting students and young Ontarians who are struggling to get a start in the work world. A whole generation, in fact, is facing a future without a lot of options these days. They're not just seeing the kind of opportunities, frankly, that many of us saw when we were in their shoes, the kind of opportunities that their parents saw back in the day. Those opportunities just don't seem to be there for folks.

I'm not talking just as the leader of the Ontario New Democrat Party. I have a son who's part of that generation. He has also been someone who has seen post-secondary education costs skyrocket in the last couple of years as so many young people have been struggling with that issue. In fact, his generation is paying the highest post-secondary tuition fees in the entire country. Not only will they graduate with the most debt, but they will also have the fewest employment opportunities in Ontario's history. It's a sad commentary on the lack of effectiveness of this Liberal government.

The lucky few may graduate to find paid work where they can apply the skills they've learned while they were in school, but that's, unfortunately, the lucky few. The sad truth is that many will be lucky to find any minimum wage job, and many of them will end up, for example, in the service industry. We know that's what happens these days.

More and more graduates are bogged down with education debt. They're stuck in their parents' basements because they simply cannot afford to find a place of their own. A fact that the government would rather sweep under the rug as well is that as many as two thirds of Ontario students aren't even eligible for the Liberals' tuition grant that has been touted by the members across the way. The bottom line is, many, many kids don't actually qualify to receive that tuition grant.

The official youth unemployment rate, as people in this chamber probably know, is nearly 15% right now. That's double what the provincial average is in terms of unemployment for everyone else. Students and new grads are one of the fastest-growing groups of people using food banks in this province. What kind of sad commentary is that on the situation here in the province of Ontario: that students and young people, recent graduates, are the fastest-growing users of food banks? It is quite something to be horrified by. I hope the Liberals are paying attention.

The reality is that, to add insult to injury, because there is no oversight and no accountability for employers in this province, many of them are taking advantage of these desperate young people, people who are desperate for opportunities. Too often, young workers are forced, if they want to get any kind of experience whatsoever, to provide their labour for free—another practice that the Liberals have allowed to proliferate here in Ontario.

Too often, the entry-level jobs that once existed in Ontario are now unpaid, illegal internships. Young people aren't asking for the moon; they're just asking for a fair chance to be valued and respected and compensated for their skills and their labour. They deserve that respect. That's the very least they deserve.

They expect that the government of Ontario will protect their rights to earn a living instead of protecting the interests of, in some cases, very exploitative corporations and employers.

With the member from London West's private member's bill, New Democrats are actually offering protection for vulnerable workers in this province and some badly needed hope for young people and their families.

I hope this government will set aside its partisan interests and ensure that this bill is actually passed today, and not only that, Speaker; that it actually moves through the legislative process and becomes law in this province. Why? Because we owe it to our children and our grandchildren. We owe it to them to end illegal, unpaid internships in this province, and we owe it to actually update our education system and its connection to work by bringing fairly paid work and work-integrated learning into the province of Ontario.

These initiatives are long past due. We've seen too many kids losing hope and unable to make their way in life. That's unacceptable, and I look forward to all parties passing this legislation today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I'd like to thank the member from London West for bringing this bill forward—this very important bill. She's absolutely right that experiential learning opportunities are of significant importance. The on-the-job training these programs provide can have enormous benefits, both for youth and employers.

Co-ops and other work placements give students a chance to understand the ins and outs of the profession they're pursuing. They provide exposure to the work environment at some of the companies that the students are interested in.

1410

Experiential learning also gives employers a chance to develop the skill sets that are needed in their field and see how well their student employees fit in with the company. Students who graduate with work experience seem to have an advantage, an extra edge academically and professionally. Indeed, some companies end up hiring the students they have employed in co-op programs after graduation.

I agree with the member from London West, and our government agrees, that these programs are of vital importance. I myself participated in a paid placement or co-op program when I was a student at Ryerson in the applied chemistry and biology program. While I had my colleagues, my friends at U of T, reading about high-performance liquid chromatography, a technique used in analytical chemistry, I was actually using a high-performance liquid chromatography instrument in my placement.

I know that our government is working hard to engage stakeholders and hear their feedback on Bill 64, a process that we began back before the 2014 election when this bill was first introduced. We are already working closely with the Council of Ontario Universities and with Colleges Ontario, two groups specifically mentioned in Bill 64 as members of the proposed advisory council on work-integrated learning. We do this in order to support the 40,000 co-op students at post-secondary institutions across the province. Moreover, our Productivity and Innovation Fund supports a number of projects across the province to include more co-op and work-integrated learning opportunities for our post-secondary students.

Again, this bill is in line with the government's perspective on experiential learning, and I certainly agree with providing more provisions to protect co-op students, interns and other vulnerable workers. It's important to note some of the work our government has already been doing on this important issue.

In November, just five months after we came back, following the June election, Bill 18, the Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy Act, received royal assent. This bill pays particular attention to co-op

students. It ensures that they receive the workplace health and safety protections that are laid out in the Employment Standards Act.

The Ministry of Labour has also been using social media to reach out to help everyone, including young workers, understand their rights under the Employment Standards Act. I know that the Ministry of Labour recently invested an additional \$3 million in proactive enforcement, with a special focus on cracking down on unpaid internships across a variety of sectors.

All of this is to say that many of the policies in Bill 64 build on the government's vision that if you perform work for someone, you're covered by the Employment Standards Act and you deserve to be paid.

There is a narrow exemption for co-op students, trainees and self-employed that has been on the books for many years and is intended to allow accredited post-secondary programs to give their students valuable work experience. But it seems that Bill 64 speaks positively to this point as well, and aims to increase paid work placements for students, similar to the one I participated in as a student.

Indeed, the bill's proposed advisory council on work-integrated learning would—and here I'm quoting from the bill—"advise the minister with respect to ways to increase work-integrated learning opportunities, particularly paid opportunities" and "make recommendations for improving the regulation and oversight of unpaid work-integrated learning opportunities." I agree that these are valuable goals that deserve our consideration.

The Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act also makes a number of valuable points when it comes to the dissemination of information on workplace rights. It proposes that a poster be displayed by employers who have students working for them, and that this document would clearly explicate the rights of the student and obligations of the employer. In the same vein of providing as much information to experiential learners and interns as possible, Bill 64 proposes that trainees who do not meet the definition of "employee" under the Employment Standards Act are given written notice on the following four points: first, the sections of the act that do and do not cover the individual; second, the reasons that the individual is not considered an employee; third, the length of the placement and description of the work to be performed; and fourth, how many hours the individual will be working.

All of these points make sense to me. It's valuable to ensure that this information is provided to trainees and co-op students, and it's important that we protect vulnerable workers from exploitation.

Like I mentioned earlier, I'm proud that our government has been cracking down on unpaid internships.

Again, I'd like to thank the member from London West for bringing this bill forward. I know that our government is always looking to ensure that we protect Ontario's vulnerable workers and to increase opportunities for young people to get valuable work experience, as I did.

I'm sure that my colleagues the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities are going to have their staff look at this bill very carefully and will continue to consult with their stakeholders about its content.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand up in support of Bill 64 from the member from London West.

She believes that research and evidence should inform policy. She believes that the evidence should actually make legislation stronger, and I think that we can all agree that that's an admirable goal.

There are 300,000 people in Canada who are currently working in unpaid internships. Bill 64 will prevent the exploitation of unpaid internships in Ontario by increasing employment awareness of obligations under the Employment Standards Act.

Earlier today, some you may have seen that Peggy Jarvie, the ED for Co-operative Education and Career Action at the University of Waterloo, was here in support of this bill. That has a lot of weight, Mr. Speaker, because the University of Waterloo is truly a national leader around paid co-operative student learning programs. It is a model that should be replicated across this province and across this country. When I've done student round tables at the University of Waterloo, students have told me that because they are paid for their co-operative experiences, this allows them to go to university. So it is very much a program which lends itself to equality.

The value of experiential learning cannot be questioned. The evidence is there. It has already been cited by the member from London West. The value to our economy cannot be questioned either. There is a macro-economic effect when students are paid in the workforce, which has a trickle-down effect on the entire economy. And if there was ever an economy that needed more assistance, it would be the economy of the province of Ontario.

I want people to remember something. There is a greater weight of responsibility that we have, as legislators in this place, when a piece of legislation like Bill 64 comes before us. Three young people died last year. They were unpaid interns; they were co-operative students. They did not know their rights. They did not know their rights because they were not in a paid position in the province of Ontario. This is a very common issue. This is a worker safety issue.

We want young people to have these experiential learning opportunities. We want them to go to work in the morning and come back to their families at the end of the day. This piece of legislation, if adopted by the Liberal government, would ensure that that actually happens.

There's a moral responsibility for us to do the right thing today by supporting Bill 64. It obviously has our support. If there was ever an opportunity for us to reach across the aisles and work together, it would be on this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is a pleasure to join the debate today. It's an exciting day for New Democrats, as we have anticipated the introduction of the bill from our colleague the member from London West. I want to congratulate her on her efforts. She has been a champion for young people and for the issue of advocating for unpaid interns and those who find themselves in precarious work positions in the province of Ontario. Unfortunately, she has had to do a lot of work and a lot of consultation.

A lot of data exists on the nature of precarious work in the province of Ontario. Go figure. This economy that is touted by the government to be progressive, innovative and responsive—but, needless to say, there is a glaring gap in our employment standards when it relates to young people and their attempts to join the workforce and labour market entry.

The bill proposed by the member from London West identifies that issue, plugs those holes in the legislation and gives young workers in the province of Ontario an opportunity and hope and a reasonable level of expectation that they will find gainful employment and enter into a career, to be productive members of society.

Some of the most important parts of this bill, which I believe fix some of those issues, are the areas in the Employment Standards Act—those glaring gaps in protection for young people.

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They would seem so reasonable in developed countries that you wouldn't even expect them to exist in the province of Ontario. However, simply informing members of their rights, informing young workers of their rights as interns and as unpaid workers or co-op students, would be reasonable. That sounds like something we should be doing, although it is not a provision within our Employment Standards Act; something that would be so minuscule in terms of the efforts put forward by the province. And I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the members of the House, that it is the most important part of a young worker's experience: to enter the work site and know their rights, to know they are protected under occupational health and safety legislation and the Employment Standards Act.

The bill is reasonable in every metric and every scope. It also, of course, codifies work-integrated learning with specific criteria that outline why, and how beneficial it would be to create a pathway for co-op students and post-secondary students to be able to enter the workforce and have gainful employment.

The arguments have been made, well-nuanced. We have submissions and support from some well-recognized organizations that have studied the issue, I believe, to exhaustion. They include the Ontario Undergraduate Students Alliance, the Canadian Federation of Students, Students Against Unpaid Internship Scams and the Canadian Intern Association.

Many stakeholders understand that the time is now to protect young workers in the province of Ontario. These

issues are before you. The resolutions are before you. Please accept and understand that this is done in good faith and that you can actually achieve the results that young people and young workers in the province are looking for.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now recognize the member for London West. You have two minutes for a response.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I want to sincerely thank all the members who participated in the debate today. It was extremely gratifying to hear the kind of support that exists for this legislation and also the recognition of this issue as one of the most important challenges of our generation in ensuring that we're not leaving young people behind as we try to move this economy forward.

There were a couple of points that were made that I think deserve to be highlighted. The member for Chatham–Kent–Essex and also the member for Essex talked about the definition of work-integrated learning that is included in the legislation, and that to me is something that is very important.

We don't simply want our post-secondary institutions to take the job of training our workforce. Our post-secondary institutions have to provide students with meaningful opportunities to gain workplace experience but also to learn. This is not just a training program; this is a learning experience for our students, and we have to make sure that these programs that are brought into post-secondary institutions are high-quality and have a strong pedagogical component.

There was also a reference to anonymous reporting for unpaid interns. This is one of the biggest challenges. Unpaid interns who feel they have to work for free in order to get into the labour market don't feel that they have an option to report to the Ministry of Labour. The current mechanisms are completely inadequate, completely ineffective, and we need to enable young people to have a mechanism to exert their rights or insist on their rights.

I appreciate all the comments that have been made and look forward to seeing this bill move to legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. We'll take the vote at the end of private members' public business.

SERVICE CLUBS

Mr. Jim Wilson: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Minister of Finance should immediately move to have a standing committee investigate the legislative and regulatory barriers and burdens facing service clubs in Ontario who serve their respective communities and conduct ongoing community service which helps alleviate the demand for publicly-funded services.

The committee shall focus on the following topics: (1) financial audits; (2) restrictive regulations surrounding fundraising; (3) taxes and fees; and (4) declining membership.

That the committee shall have the authority to conduct province-wide hearings and undertake research, and

generally shall have such powers and duties as are required to investigate the issue.

That the committee shall present an interim report to the House no later than September 1, 2015, and a final report no later than January 1, 2016.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank the overwhelming number of my colleagues that are here today. It's an important—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Huge support.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Thanks, Lou. I know I'm going to get your support too.

We're here today, colleagues from all sides of the House, to talk about an important issue. It's an issue that I don't think has been given enough attention over the years. It's an issue that I would think this government, in particular, considering the amount of debt that they have, would be keen to address because of the vast benefit these organizations bring to our economy. The issue we're talking about, of course, is the important role service clubs play in communities across Ontario and the role the government can play to assist these clubs to maximize their full potential. A lot of people think service clubs have the same tax benefits and rules as registered charities. The fact of the matter is, for the most part, they don't. That's what I'm going to discuss now.

Centred around such mottos as "Service Above Self," Rotary; "We Serve," Lions; "Serving the Community's Greatest Need," Kin Canada; "Friend of Youth," the Optimists; "Serving the Children of the World," Kiwanis; and "We Share," Quota International, we can all agree that these service clubs and others bring vast benefits to our communities.

First and foremost, they are social clubs. They bring fellowship and fraternalism to their membership, which in turn strengthens the communities they serve. For young professionals or people who are new to a community, social clubs bring those people together to maximize a community's potential gain both socially and economically.

Second, beyond fellowship, these volunteer organizations serve the community need. Made up of people who live and breathe in the communities they serve, service club membership best understands their community's intrinsic values and needs, and fills the fiscal holes that government and other agencies can't. It's important to remember that the charitable work that these organizations do helps to alleviate financial burden on government coffers. Governments can't and shouldn't pay for everything.

In Ontario, the debt has become the highest in the country. The deficit is more than all other provinces combined. On top of this bleak fiscal reality, population projections are forecast to shift the province to an older age structure, which will certainly bring with it additional financial pressure. According to the Ministry of Finance,

Ontario's senior population is expected to double over the next 25 years.

Ontario already spends 41% of the provincial budget on health care, and according to TD economists, this is projected to increase to 80% by 2030. It's unsustainable. To prepare for the future, we need to consider alternatives like fostering the working relationships we already have in our communities.

Service clubs relieve the financial burden while providing intrinsic social benefits to the communities they serve. They are a win-win, which is why it is so important that we as legislators make it as easy as possible for them to continue the good work they do in our communities.

I chose to do this motion on service clubs after I hosted a local round table in my riding last April. People from various organizations attended, and frankly, I was surprised to learn about the multitude of issues and challenges they deal with on an ongoing basis that hinder their everyday operations.

Immediately following the meeting, I wrote to the Minister of Finance to articulate as best I could the challenges identified. To date, my records show that I have not received a response, but to give the minister the benefit of the doubt—the issues are complex—I will presume that the government is still thoroughly investigating the matter. I'm also looking forward to hearing from members of the government side and the NDP, and hopefully we'll get some answers from the government today.

I brought that letter with me today, Mr. Speaker, as it identifies many of the challenges and issues that service clubs face; I'd like to read it into the record.

"April 25, 2014

"Dear Minister:

"I am writing to you today after meeting with local service clubs in my riding concerning a number of issues they have identified that are hindering operations. The main message that came out of the meeting was a concern with the cost of doing business as a result of increased regulations, taxes and fees. Let me briefly touch on each of these issues.

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"The first issue discussed was financial audits. If the service club earns more than \$50,000 after expenses on a fundraiser they must pay \$4,500 for an audit. If a service club earns less than \$50,000, the audit is \$450. As a result, service clubs limit their fundraising. Minister, forcing charities to pay nearly 10% of their profit on fees is ridiculous and I question why this \$50,000 threshold is not higher and why they are being asked to pay such costly audits."

"Another problem is unnecessary regulations. At one time, service clubs were allowed to sell tickets out of province and over the phone. Today, regulations restrict these sales, leaving them unable to access the lucrative American market and other provinces. Service clubs also have problems with lottery licences as municipalities limit the number of licences issued at any given time.

This inhibits them from working on more than one project.

“A third problem is taxes. Service clubs question why they have to pay so much in tax when they are a charity. For example, on a car raffle they have to pay close to \$10,000 in taxes for that vehicle. They are also charged lottery licence fees costing up to \$9,000. On top of this, service clubs that own their own building must pay property taxes. You can see how these taxes add up.

“A fourth problem is costs associated with being a volunteer. Directors of the club must have liability insurance. Members must assume the costs of volunteer police checks and many other items. Enticing membership is already a problem for a lot of these groups; the cost of living is making it hard for people to even volunteer. This is a big problem across Ontario.

“Another concern raised was the OLG’s plan for a new casino in the community. The service clubs are concerned that this will take away from their profits. One suggestion was to create a revenue-sharing program, similar to what already exists in Alberta, where the service clubs provide volunteers in the casino and receive a small fraction of profits. I would appreciate it if you would find out more about this option.

“Minister, frankly I was surprised by the amount of issues these clubs identified. It’s important to recognize that these are charities working hard to pay for a variety of projects within our communities. That said, I would appreciate it if you would review these problems and respond. In the meantime, I would ask that you advise what tax exemptions or assistance is available to help service clubs.

“Thank you for your attention and please accept my best wishes.

“Sincerely,

“Jim Wilson, MPP.”

Mr. Speaker, following my decision to draft this motion that’s before us today, I sent a letter and questionnaire to as many service clubs as I could from right across the province, and the response has been tremendous. Over 100 service clubs responded to the questionnaire, many of them representing several service clubs across the district or area. I think that reveals the extent of public interest for changes to be made.

In fact, one letter was from the Lions Club multiple district A, which represents Lions and Lions clubs across Ontario. The multiple district A governors’ council held a special meeting to discuss this motion and passed the following resolution:

“That the governors’ council hereby endorses and supports the resolution presented by Jim Wilson, MPP, Simcoe–Grey, requesting the Ontario Minister of Finance to immediately move to have a standing committee investigate the legislative and regulatory barriers and burdens facing service clubs in Ontario; and further, that council hereby authorizes the MDA secretary to forward said resolution to the Premier of Ontario, the interim leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, the leader

of the New Democratic Party and the Ontario Minister of Finance.”

Colleagues, I have brought photocopies of all of the responses and I’d like to bring them to Liberal and NDP representatives to use as a reference while working on this issue, and I do that in a non-partisan way.

The questionnaire asked five questions, but because many of the responses mimic the issues and challenges I already touched on in the letter I just read, in the time I have left, Mr. Speaker, I want to focus on the fifth question, “What changes could the provincial government make to better facilitate the outstanding work that you and other service clubs do?” That was the question. Here’s a list of the grassroots suggestions directly from the service clubs.

In terms of regulations, the clubs suggested less administrative burden, particularly for clubs with a proven track record. Some of the clubs note that licensing reporting requirements are required at all levels of government for the same project.

Other clubs suggest implementing a simpler tax system that volunteers can easily navigate. One club noted that the tax department was even baffled by the complexity of the regulations.

The clubs suggest the government review the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp’s dominance in Ontario’s gaming industry and the pressure that it’s putting on clubs. They note the provincial government is both the regulator, through the Alcohol and Gaming Commission, and the primary operator, through the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp, often creating unnecessary red tape and duplication.

Clubs want more flexibility. One club described spending months to secure approval for a simple river race of logs and rubber turtles because the guidelines only allow rubber ducks. The Alcohol and Gaming Commission took months to approve the fundraiser. They noted that the approval process for that single application required the approval of the municipality, police, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of the Environment.

In terms of taxes and fees, the clubs suggest tax rebates for non-profit organizations, particularly on HST and property taxes, allowing the clubs to utilize a percentage of fundraising towards their administration.

Changes to insurance coverage: Many noted that they often need multiple policies to cover the same event. Service clubs suggest the province give municipalities the ability to grant property tax relief to non-profits, not just registered charities. Also suggested is a tax rebate on the HST. Finally, they would ask that the government make them aware of available grants and programs that might assist them in their daily work.

In terms of recruiting volunteers, service clubs suggest—and I would like to thank the Wasaga Beach Kinette Club for this suggestion—making membership fees tax-deductible or creating tax incentives for volunteers. Other service clubs asked for help with a campaign to promote volunteerism and membership drives.

Keith White from my riding, who's an honorary Lion and a Legion associate member, along with being a councillor in Essa township, suggests that better training on how to recruit and retain volunteers would benefit many clubs. He suggests simply collecting educational material now available and finding ways to disseminate it across the province.

Another idea was the creation of a provincial service club awards program like apparently they have in Saskatchewan.

I hope it's clear that there are a number of issues that need further examination. I anticipate that this is only the beginning of an in-depth discussion. My motion asks that the Minister of Finance move to have a standing committee investigate the legislative and regulatory barriers and burdens facing service clubs, and I hope the government will agree to do this today.

I welcome and encourage the support of all members. I realize that this is a complex issue. There are many departments of the government involved, but I think we should get moving on it. We need service clubs now more than ever as we face the challenging fiscal climate we find ourselves in in the province of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you for allowing me to rise and speak on the motion today. I'm happy to say that I support the motion to call on the Ministry of Finance to look into the complex regulations that surround our service clubs.

As we all know from our constituents, these clubs do great work in our communities. My office in Fort Erie is space that I rent from the Lions Club of Fort Erie, a group that's done excellent work for seniors in that town. Regardless of income barriers, the Lions Club of Fort Erie reaches out and engages the seniors in that community. I'm proud to say they've been welcome in my office with my staff, providing space for seniors to remain active and healthy, engage one another and engage the public in services. They are truly the hub of our communities.

I say all that without even mentioning their fundraisers, which I'm very glad to say I participate in. They cook some of the best food you can find in Ontario and raise money for good causes. If you are ever in my area, I highly recommend stopping at one of our Lions Club's fundraisers. You certainly won't be disappointed.

It's just not the Lions Club that has that kind of community spirit. Service clubs throughout my riding show the same passion. Take, for example, the Ridgeway Kinsmen. They started with a group of 12 members who themselves rebuilt their club and opened a new facility just a couple of weeks ago. I'm proud to say I was there for the club's opening in Ridgeway. They'll continue to have my support, including at their breakfast coming up this weekend.

1440

I'm honoured to speak highly of the Ridgeway Lions from my riding, people who do great work like my

friends from Ridgeway, who carry out incredible outreach and put on equally fantastic fundraisers in my riding. I'm really blessed to have such an active and talented group putting on these fundraisers in Niagara.

These aren't the only service clubs that we should all admire. There are our great Legions across the province. We have a number in my riding. Each are as dedicated as the next. They teach proper respect for our veterans and are never afraid to give back to our communities. I'd like to personally commend the Niagara Falls branches—479, 396 and 51—130 in Fort Erie, 124 in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and 230 in Ridgeway, for everything they give back to our veterans and to our community. They support those who fought for us, and we can do our part to support them here in this Legislature, and I'm glad to support them, and I'm sure everybody else here today is.

Mr. Speaker, this is the same of all the clubs: the Kinsmen, the Lions and the Kiwanis clubs, Mr. Wilson talked about the Rotary clubs—we all have Rotary clubs in our areas as well; again, in Niagara Falls, my riding. They're incredibly respected in our community, both by our constituents and by myself. I'm also glad for the Knights of Columbus as well. My brother-in-law is a member—Andrew Howcroft—and he does great work in the city of Niagara Falls.

These groups all have a mandate to give back to their communities and to make their hometowns and their cities a better place to live. They absolutely embody the spirit of giving back to where one comes from. In the past two years—and this is important for everybody to listen to—these groups have been punching well above their weight. Around the province, so many of these clubs and groups are being faced with declining membership. On top of planning for their work, they have to worry about membership and they have to navigate through these complex regulations at the federal and provincial levels.

We can help to remove some of this pressure by addressing these regulatory issues, especially at a time when these groups need our help. Budget cuts by this government and by the PCs before them have left a lot of people struggling to make ends meet. These groups have done an incredible job of filling in the cracks created by these cuts.

These groups have all facilitated and continue to see—and think about this, and this is important for service clubs. I know a lot of people aren't paying attention right now, but you should. These service clubs are facing hydro bills that are putting their entire clubs in jeopardy. We have to take a look at that and help them.

We need to make regulations for these service clubs so we can help with their fundraisers. We hear the same message everywhere we go. The hydro rates are putting these facilities in jeopardy. I know that we heard from Mr. Wilson, my colleague. He raised the very same thought of what is going on around hydro rates.

When they're out there working in our ridings, we should be working here. When they're in our ridings, we should be working here to support them in every way that we can.

As you can see, these groups represent some of the most caring aspects of our community. If they are caught up in red tape and complex regulations at the provincial and federal levels, then I think an appeal to the Minister of Finance to strike a committee to look into solving this is a good idea.

I'd also like to quickly stress how important volunteering is for those listening here today. These groups around the province are facing declining membership, as I mentioned. We need to encourage more volunteers, both young and old, to join these clubs and make sure their great work continues long into the future. These groups and clubs support our community, so let us support them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you—I was ready to say "Madam Speaker," but I'm late.

Let me first say I congratulate my friend from Simcoe—Grey for bringing forward this motion today. I think it's honourable that we think of people who give a lot of time to our communities.

A saying that I always say when I meet with volunteers or service clubs—I look at them and say, "Wow, what would our communities look like if you weren't here doing the work that you do?" That goes across all the service clubs and all the volunteers. Speaker, I think it's very, very important that we make sure the service clubs stay alive, and I know they have been struggling.

I'm a Rotarian, a Brighton Rotarian, for the last 14 or 15 years. When I joined the club, we had over 70 members for a small community of less than 1,000 people. We're down to about 30-some-odd now. The reality is that not all participate; they do come out to help. That goes across all the service clubs. We're part of district 7070 in Rotary, and they tell me that right across the region, which goes from Newmarket to Belleville, they are suffering. I'm sure it's the same across the province.

The motion outlines some of the stuff, as the member brought forward, that frankly is more of a federal jurisdiction. I think we should not just focus on what we can do here at Queen's Park within these walls, but also beyond with our federal cousins. So I think some pressure needs to be put there.

I would say to the member that, as we progress through this—and I know he's already started to give some good statistics today, some good examples of surveys that he sent out. Our club, by the way, has received one. I'm not sure if it has been responded to yet. But that is, I think, a good measure to try to get the message of what people really think out there. The interesting part about that is that when you task people to do something, that you ask for some information, if they take the time to fill those blanks, that is really worthwhile information; it's not just something that they want to speak about.

Speaker, in the few minutes that I have, I just want to touch on some of the good work that the service clubs—some of the service clubs, because I don't have enough time to do all. For example, coming up on March 14 and

15, Warkworth, a beautiful community north of the 401, is having its annual Maple Syrup Festival. For two days, I tell you, they draw 4,000 or 5,000 people. I normally end up helping for half a day to serve fresh maple syrup right off the tap and boiled right there, along with fresh pancakes. So I smell like a pancake for about a week after that, but it's worthwhile.

Interjection.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It's excellent.

That's a service club not affiliated to any national service club. They just do it to help their community.

The Kiwanis Club of Quinte West, of Trenton, have a one-day lunch just before Christmas to raise funds for the Salvation Army. Can you imagine: Over lunch, about 100 people raise over \$100,000 for the Salvation Army. I'm not sure how else you could do this and help the Salvation Army do the good work that they do.

As I mentioned, we have Rotary Clubs in every community in the riding I represent, and they all do good work; for example, along with Bill Gates, who matches dollars that the clubs raise to eradicate polio. Speaker, we're almost there. If it wasn't for Rotary International and Bill Gates, we'd still be facing polio issues.

Mr. Speaker, we, once again, because I'm more familiar, for the last 14 or 15 years—we sponsor exchange students. We take in students from all over the world and also pay for students going out to other parts of the world. It's a program that's unbelievable, the benefit that these kids get from these exchanges.

I guess I'm trying to point out how valuable service clubs are in our communities, how valuable volunteers are.

1450

Once again, I cannot refrain from saying: What would our communities look like without service clubs, without volunteers? We need to encourage that, Speaker.

What the member is asking on this resolution, the best way to describe it—although we need to do everything we need to do, and I know he has already done a lot of work through his questionnaires, we're almost trying to kill a fly with a huge sledgehammer. I think we can do the same thing. I think he set a good example of how we can do that already, and I think maybe we need to support that kind of initiative. Frankly, in travelling the province, I think clubs will be able to give us that information. I know he has had a good response, and that's a good indication.

I would encourage the member to take that approach and bring it to the House here. Let's see if there are ways that make sense of how we can address the issues that he has brought forward, which are very, very valid.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this motion today from the member from Simcoe—Grey, my boss.

I think all of us in this House recognize the importance of service clubs and charitable groups in each and every community across the province. They fill meaningful

roles and gaps within our social fabric and enrich our quality of life. In fact, without these clubs and groups, important services, projects, events and activities just wouldn't be there. That's why, when they speak, it's our job as legislators to listen, especially when they have such serious concerns as we're discussing here today.

We simply believe that the Minister of Finance needs to listen to these concerns, review them and take action. We want them to address them so that our service clubs and charities can continue to do the vital and necessary work they do, day in and day out, in our communities across Ontario.

I will quickly sum up—again, to repeat some of what the member from Simcoe—Grey said—the areas that not us, but the service clubs and the groups themselves have highlighted to us. These are the areas and issues of concern.

The financial audits: Forcing these charities to pay nearly 10% of their profits on fees is ridiculous. As you've heard, if a service club earns more than \$50,000, after expenses, on a fundraiser, they must pay \$4,500 for an audit, but below that, it's \$450. It's a disincentive for these service clubs to fundraise. Surely we can come up with a better solution.

When I think of Nipissing University or Canadore College, and I look at the donor wall and I see all of the service clubs that have stepped up; when I walk into our new hospital in the city of North Bay and I see the donor plaque with the service clubs that have built rooms—in fact, wings in the hospital, wings in the university, wings in the college—and this money is all earned through their charitable donations—for the province to take their slice, to dip their beak in so generously, is ridiculous.

These unnecessary regulations are also a point. Why are we restricting service clubs from selling tickets out of the province and over the phone, and they're unable to access funds in the US and other provinces? Municipalities limit the number of lottery licences issued at a time, keeping them from working on more than one project. Again, these are areas where we can do better.

When you drive down Lakeshore Drive and come over the overpass in North Bay and you see this bridge that crosses, it was built by one of the service clubs. It's a trail that runs through our entire city. It's not built by the municipality; not built by the province; not built by the feds. It's built by the money from these service clubs that have fundraised—and funded these very important projects throughout our communities.

When you think about taxes, it's a wonder service clubs are able to undertake any of these fundraising ventures at all. When you hear that service clubs, on a car raffle, for instance, have to pay close to \$10,000 in taxes for the vehicle, and then a lottery licence, costing them up to \$9,000—throw in the property taxes for the clubs that own their own building, and what's left?

When I go down to the waterfront in North Bay, when I go to the waterfront in Callander, when I go to the waterfront in Chisholm, there are parks and beaches that are built by these charities. These are the most generous

of groups. They work so hard. They run bingos, they have lotteries, they have fundraisers that raise nothing but money for other people to share.

Lastly, volunteer costs: The directors of a club must have liability insurance, and members must assume the cost of volunteer police checks, among other items. The cost of living makes it hard enough for those to volunteer. These other costs deter membership. Again, we here in the House simply have to do what the member for Simcoe—Grey is asking: We have to do better.

I should add that there is a valid concern, in communities where OLG is planning to locate casinos, about the impact this would have on the ability of charities to fundraise. Again, this is a question that needs to be addressed before any of these go forward, so that clubs can prepare, react and adjust to what they can contribute to their good work.

All we're asking, through this motion today, is for the minister to consider ways to address the hurdles facing our service clubs, our fundraising groups and our charitable groups across the province. They're vital, they're crucial, they're important and we can't do without them.

I'm proud to support this motion. I would urge members of this House to do likewise, and I thank you for this time to speak in this Legislature again.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to add to motion 16 on red tape review for service clubs.

Comme pour tous ceux qui ont parlé avant moi, c'est évident qu'il y a plusieurs clubs sociaux qui sont dans Nickel Belt. Aujourd'hui, je veux vous parler plus précisément du Club 50, un club qui est à Chelmsford, dans Nickel Belt, juste pour vous donner une idée des difficultés que l'on met sur les épaules. C'est un centre pour personnes âgées. En anglais on appelle ça un « elderly persons centre ». Ils reçoivent un petit peu de financement, 21 000 \$ par année de financement, du ministère des personnes âgées. Et parce qu'ils reçoivent ça, ça ajoute à tout ce qu'ils ont besoin de faire.

Parce qu'ils font plus de 50 000 \$ de revenus, ils devront charger la TPS. Bon, charger la TPS sur les locations de salles, c'est assez évident, et sur les consommations, parce qu'ils ont un bar, ça aussi, c'est assez évident.

Mais là, qu'est-ce que tu fais avec—ils ont des espèces de dîners communautaires et tout le monde donne cinq dollars, qui défraye une partie du prix du dîner, mais vraiment c'est un dîner communautaire. Est-ce qu'ils devront commencer à charger la taxe de vente harmonisée là-dessus?

Même chose : il y a des groupes de leurs membres qui se réunissent pour jouer aux « darts », pour jouer aux cartes, pour passer le temps, faire des activités, et eux, ils vont chacun payer un petit montant pour se réunir au club. Est-ce que le club devra commencer à charger la TPS là-dessus? À un moment donné ça devient tellement difficile à comprendre qu'ils finissent par dépenser des sommes d'argent faramineuses qui n'ont rien à faire avec

les buts du club. Les buts du club, c'est de s'assurer que les personnes aînées restent engagées dans leur communauté, ont la possibilité de passer de bons moments ensemble et demeurent actives.

Mais là, tu regardes : ils doivent faire faire une vérification générale. Le vérificateur charge 9 000 \$. Ça, 9 000 \$, pour un club qui reçoit 21 000 \$ du ministère, c'est beaucoup d'argent. Non seulement qu'ils ont tout ça à faire, mais avec le nouveau projet de loi que l'on a passé, le projet de loi pour les corporations à but non-lucratif—cette affaire-là a 210 pages d'épaisseur. Là, eux autres ont reçu ça, les 210 pages. Ils l'ont imprimé. Ils ont commencé à lire ça, puis là ils se sont dit : « On s'en va tous. Peux-tu me dire ce que ça veut dire? »

1500

Pourquoi est-ce que le gouvernement n'a pas mis en place un mécanisme pour aider les clubs? Ça, c'est un gros club, mais j'ai des petits clubs aussi dans Nickel Belt, le club à Azilda, le club à Hanmer, le club à Gogama. Il y en a qui sont très petits.

Là, quand ils reçoivent ça, un projet de loi avec toutes ces explications et qui est long de 210 pages, êtes-vous surpris, monsieur le Président, qu'ils aient de la misère à recruter des membres? Êtes-vous surpris qu'ils aient de la misère à recruter un président ou une présidente? Quand tu vois toutes les responsabilités qu'on a mises sur ces petits clubs-là—les clubs, tout ce qu'ils veulent faire, c'est du bien. Puis là, on leur met un paquet de règlements, un par-dessus l'autre, qui sont difficiles à comprendre.

Donc eux, ils ont été obligés d'embaucher un avocat pour leur expliquer comment ils devraient s'assurer qu'ils sont conformes à la loi. Ils n'ont pas l'argent pour payer un avocat. Ils se sont mis ensemble. Un groupe de clubs de la région se sont mis ensemble. La FARFO s'en est mêlée pour essayer de les aider. Mais lorsque le gouvernement fait des nouvelles lois comme ça, pourquoi est-ce qu'on ne prend pas le temps de donner les outils nécessaires pour que les clubs à but non lucratif ne soient pas obligés de payer des vérificateurs, des frais d'avocat, de consultants, de ci et de ça?

La proposition qui a été faite par le Parti conservateur a du bon sens. Prenons le temps de les écouter, prenons le temps de voir ce qu'on pourrait faire de mieux, parce que ces clubs-là, quand ils voient arriver des piles de règlements de 210 pages, ils perdent leur exécutif, ils perdent leurs membres, puis c'est la communauté en entier qui perd.

Merci, monsieur le Président.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Trinity-Spadina.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Speaker.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Happy New Year.

Mr. Han Dong: Happy New Year to you, too. Happy New Year to all.

I'm very pleased to have this opportunity to discuss this very important bill. First of all, I would like to say to the member from Simcoe-Grey that this is a fantastic bill, and I look forward to supporting it. It's a very important bill.

But I also want to point something out. The member mentioned that he sent correspondence to the Minister of Finance and didn't hear back from him. In fact, there was a response, to Mr. Wilson's attention. I would like to take this opportunity to read it into the record, and I'll walk across after, to give him the hard copy.

“Dear Mr. Wilson:

“Thank you for your letter regarding issues identified by local service clubs in your riding. I apologize for the delay in responding.

“With respect to your concerns regarding a new casino in a local community, the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG) is modernizing gaming in Ontario to optimize revenue from its gaming assets in a responsible manner. OLG's modernization plan was designed to maximize the commercial viability of land-based gaming across the province, and ensure the success of each gaming site while balancing social factors such as responsible gaming. When fully implemented, the OLG modernization plan will increase net revenues to the province by approximately \$1 billion annually. These revenues will be used to fund vital public services that Ontarians depend on, such as health care and education.

“It is important to note that the government will not impose a gaming facility on a municipality that does not support one. A decision regarding the location of a gaming site will depend on an OLG business case that reflects municipal support and demonstrates the commercial viability of a gaming site in a particular location and region.

“Every year, the provincial budget outlines how gaming proceeds are allocated. The 2014 Ontario budget indicates that in 2013-14, gaming proceeds provided to the province by the OLG are to be spent in the following ways:

“—about \$1.75 billion to support the operation of hospitals;

“—\$115 million to the Ontario Trillium Foundation”—actually, many of the associations in my riding are enjoying the support of that foundation;

“—\$10 million to Ontario amateur sports;

“—\$119 million for other general government priorities, including horse racing; and

“—\$39 million for problem gambling and related programs.

“OLG's support for the Trillium Foundation and amateur sports is an effective revenue-share program that benefits charitable and not-for-profit organizations.

“With respect to the municipal charity licences, that is the responsibility of the AGCO, an agency under the Ministry of the Attorney General (MAG). I have taken the liberty of copying my colleague the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, Attorney General, so she is aware of the concerns you have raised.

“Your comments on the financial audits and the HST that service clubs must pay on the purchase of a vehicle for a car raffle are the responsibility of the federal Minister of Finance, the Honourable Joe Oliver. Accordingly, you may wish to direct your comments on that issue to” the minister responsible for that file.

“With respect to your concerns about property taxes, special provision is made under the property tax system for non-profit service clubs. Under Ontario regulation 282/98 (a regulation made under the Assessment Act), land that is owned and occupied by a non-profit service organization is taxed at the residential rate, rather than the commercial rate that would otherwise be applicable (commercial properties are typically taxed at a higher rate than residential properties).

“As well, under the Municipal Act, 2001, and the City of Toronto Act, 2006, municipalities have the option to provide property tax rebates to charities and non-profit organizations, based on parameters determined by the municipalities (there is a minimum rebate requirement for qualifying organizations, and there are optional rebate provisions at the discretion of municipalities). You may wish to speak to your local municipal office to determine whether specific non-profit service organizations are eligible for a property tax rebate.

“Thank you again for writing.”

I took that opportunity to read this letter because I do think it responds to some of the concerns that the member raised.

I want to say that service clubs are extremely important in my riding as well. Today, I went to the Wong Association to see how many people they’ve helped over 100 years. I look forward to supporting this bill and further debating this bill as it goes through the legislative process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I’m quite pleased today to speak on this very important issue that has been brought up by our interim leader, the member from Simcoe–Grey: “That, in the opinion of this House, the Minister of Finance should immediately move to have a standing committee investigate the legislative and regulatory barriers and burdens facing service clubs in Ontario....”

A lot has been said already today. Service clubs in our communities are certainly the backbone for the work that they do in our communities. We all know that they’ve played a long, vital role across the province. They strengthen our communities. Young people join them. I know the Rotary Club sponsors young people to go to different countries for a year. In fact, the MP who is representing Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock now did that Rotary exchange and continues to go out to speak of the merits of that program. These young people and people in general—they gain both socially and economically.

I think there’s nothing better than service clubs which are made up of members of communities to best understand the needs of their communities. They also fill the fiscal holes that government and other agencies can’t fill and maybe shouldn’t fill. In rural Ontario, with our smaller communities, there’s nothing truer said than that.

A lot of problems have been highlighted. I will give you a few examples, if I could. For example, the Rotary Club of Haliburton wanted to give funds for a band shell

to be built—they got some Trillium money, too—to assist for a band shell in the park. But the park was owned municipally. So they couldn’t use their proceeds from lottery tickets for that; they had to have another venue to try and fundraise money separately—again, you can only ask the community so much—for a specific project.

I know that there are many, many Rotary clubs that I have in the area and I have at least a dozen Lions Clubs. Since I’ve been an MPP, and you’re out to these events more, you notice that their membership is declining. It’s hard to get volunteers, and as the cost of living goes up, it really costs to volunteer out there.

1510

I want to bring up that these service clubs—there are no administrative dollars. They all pay for their service clubs through memberships in their organizations. We ask a lot of them and we should not be throwing up more barriers to them. When the member from Simcoe–Grey brought this up as a motion, I thought it should be done as soon as possible.

It is complex. I’m going to highlight a few of the problems. For example, in the lottery—if you make a certain amount of money, the cost of your audit has gone from \$450—if you make less than \$50,000—to up to \$4,500 to get an audit done.

I know that when clubs want to enhance their own structures—for example, curling clubs or Legions—their lottery monies cannot be put back into their aging buildings. I know that in Woodville, for example, the curling club needs a new ice plant but the money from a raffle cannot be used for that purpose. Legions face the same dilemma, and we know that our Legions are aging.

There is the opportunity to be able to sell tickets online to different provinces and different countries. We can look at that. Insurance was brought up, the cost of insurance for them; a simpler tax system they can navigate; and just more flexibility in general to have fundraising events that can then be used to further help their communities.

We could talk a long time about this, and I’m out of time. I just wanted to say to the member for Simcoe–Grey: Well done. We’ll be supporting this and look forward to the government’s action.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: I’d also like to commend Jim Wilson, our interim leader, for doing this and picking up the torch and really bringing an issue that’s big in all of our communities.

Volunteers build a better society. They serve their neighbours, their communities, their regions, their province and their country. Service clubs, Legions and all charitable organizations raise money for such things as hospital equipment, such as an MRI, to rejuvenate cenotaphs to support those valued veterans of Our Majesty’s forces, and to help families afford access to lifesaving drugs. In other words, they help to fill the gaps left by government.

As the MPP for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, I hear first-hand accounts all the time about these challenges and barriers they face in regard to financial audits, taxation, regulations and declining membership. Not long after I got elected, a fellow by the name of Terry Julian from Lion's Head, Ontario, on behalf of the hospital auxiliary, came to me and raised a very similar issue. I wrote a letter to the Minister of Finance at that time and, to be honest, I got nothing of any kind of interest to pick up the torch and change this. It was similar to that letter: "There are all kinds of plans; we're going to do better." It's not enough.

We have small-town groups and organizations that are doing this. In this case, Lion's Head, a community of 500 people, and the hospital auxiliary for many, many years, raised funds for that hospital and all kinds of good initiatives across the community. They're raising \$500 because \$500 is the cap for penny tables. The OLG then warned the auxiliary volunteers to stop fundraising too much money. That means going over the \$500 raffle cap for their local hospital. It's ludicrous. The \$500 cap was set in 1970 in the days long before we had to do the type of fundraising we have to for our hospitals, and all charitable organizations out there do the same thing.

Did anyone in government, especially when we brought it to their attention, ever consider updating these regulations to promote and permit these organizations that are so valuable in our communities to continue?

Mr. Speaker, the current regulation and red tape cannot remain status quo. What is happening is that I have people coming to my office saying, "If they're going to keep putting us through this, if they're going to take away our ability to truly be helpful and take my energy and passion, then I'm going to walk away," because they're not going to go through all of this.

I congratulate Terry Julian, the auxiliary and all of the volunteers. I want to ensure that we change this regulation to allow all of our charitable sector to be able to do things in the current day to continue to support the communities that we so richly need and value.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I thank everyone for their comments.

I now recognize the member for Simcoe–Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I want to thank all the members who appear to be supporting this resolution and I call upon the government, if it does pass today, to please implement it. Please set up a committee so that we can begin the discussion on how we can better help service clubs.

Again, the impact of new casinos on the profits of service clubs, financial audits: The minister in his letter suggested he'd take that up with the federal government. It's also something we should deal with in the committee, though, and if we got a strong resolution from the committee to do something about it, that would help pressure the federal government, but I will take the minister up on his suggestion.

HST; the need for rebates; property taxes; selling tickets out of province and over the phone, as they used to be able to do, so they could expand their ticket sales

into bigger markets; taxes paid when holding a car raffle; charges amounting to thousands of dollars for lottery licences; costs associated with being a volunteer; the cost of insurance; the taxes they pay on the prize for those lotteries, often a car—the list goes on and on.

It's probably best summarized by Bill Roskar from the Kinsmen Club of Stayner when he noted that relaxing some of the red tape and tax implications would make his club's operations easier and result in members being able to concentrate on fundraising rather than administration. He suggests that the satisfaction of being part of a social club is being able to give back to the community, and a lessened administrative burden would help to attract more volunteers. Well said, Bill, and thank you for those comments and for filling out the questionnaire.

The fact of the matter is that there's a lot we can do. I think the best way to do it is through an all-party committee. One of the technicalities in this resolution is that the opposition doesn't control the agenda at committees, so I need the Minister of Finance, a minister over there or somebody in the government to make sure we can put this before a committee and study the issue on an all-party basis. I ask that we do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take the vote at the end of regular business.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (OFF-ROAD VEHICLES), 2015

LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (VÉHICULES TOUT TERRAIN)

Mr. Vanthof moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 46, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect of off-road vehicles / Projet de loi 46, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les véhicules tout terrain.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. John Vanthof: In the spirit of full disclosure, I'd like to tell everyone that I would personally benefit from this act, because I own a Polaris Ranger 500 side-by-side—the spirit of full disclosure.

For those who are wondering what this amendment is and actually why this act is so important and this change is so important for the people of rural Ontario, I'd like to go a little bit back in history. In 2003, legislation was passed in this House to allow ATVs to go on trails, and go on the shoulders of certain highways—not the 400 series—and secondary roads. That was passed through a lot of work. This vehicle had evolved from go-karts and from three-wheelers to a safe vehicle that had become a part of rural society.

That change, in 2003, made a huge difference to people in northern Ontario and all of rural Ontario. It made a huge change, because they had been using these

vehicles, and now they could actually use them for their work and for their leisure. A lot of people go to work on ATVs. Actually, in my neighbourhood, a lot of kids go to their part-time jobs on ATVs. There is no public transportation where I'm from. In a lot of places in rural Ontario there is no public transportation, so in many cases, the ATV is a lot cheaper than having to find a second car for your 16-year-old to go to their part-time job. It makes a huge difference.

Over the years, the ATV evolved. Like everything else, it evolved, and now, more people use UTVs than ATVs. The difference is that you can have more passengers on a UTV. An ATV can only legally have one passenger. With an ATV you have to straddle the gas tank and you have to have handlebars. A UTV usually has a bench seat and a steering wheel. It's a four-wheel-drive golf cart, for lack of a better word. It's an all-terrain golf cart. More people use these, and they basically do the same job as an ATV.

1520

The big difference is, as our population gets older—and the same thing is happening in rural Ontario as in the rest of Ontario—it's easier to use a UTV than an ATV. You don't have to straddle the gas tank; you can use a steering wheel. It's much easier to learn how to drive a UTV. The problem is, the legislation governing these vehicles hasn't evolved along with the vehicle. That's the problem.

Rural Ontarians have been pushing for a long time. My colleague from Algoma-Manitoulin has been pushing for this; my colleague from Parry Sound-Muskoka has been pushing for this; my colleague from Nickel Belt—all my rural colleagues from all parties have been pushing for this. We thought we'd reached a pinnacle where we were going to be successful when the member from Glengarry-Prescott from the government side—on November 7, 2013, we all supported his resolution to change the regulations so that users of UTVs would be allowed the same regulations as the users of ATVs. A lot of people thought that we'd reached it.

Imagine our surprise when here we're now in 2015 and nothing has changed, despite—

M^{me} France Gélinas: I wasn't surprised.

Mr. John Vanthof: But imagine the surprise from people who still actually had faith in the government at that time.

This isn't costly; this isn't groundbreaking; this is basically a recognition of the needs of the people of rural Ontario. That's what this is.

After we did all kinds of petitions and letters—I would like to read the response from the then Minister of Transportation after his party passed this motion. This is from Glen Murray, who was, at that time, the Minister of Transportation:

"I followed the debate on MPP Grant Crack's (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell) motion and understand that members of the Legislative Assembly, various municipalities and ORV users feel very strongly about increasing the on-road access for various ORV types. The

ministry is aware of some of the additional safety features of other ORV types compared to single-rider ATVs, but I would be interested in hearing about how to mitigate our safety concerns as these vehicles are designed for off-road environments, not highways."

Well, to the minister of the time, so are ATVs. ATVs are designed for off-road environments, not highways, yet they are permitted under the act. If anyone is going to tell you that an ATV is safer than a UTV, they're wrong. A UTV has roll bars; a UTV has seat belts.

I've got a couple of letters here. I really like this one. It explains, in plain, common English. Someone from my riding:

"Dear John Vanthof, MPP Timiskaming-Cochrane:

"My wife and I are excited about the proposed changes to regulation 316/03 allowing side-by-sides and two-up ATVs the same privileges as regular ATVs. We have been riding ATVs since 2007"—actually, they're not from my riding—"and are members of the Haliburton ATV Association. Three years ago, my wife cut her finger ... and severed a tendon. She had three unsuccessful surgeries to repair her finger, and unfortunately she wore a cast on her arm for about a year and a half, on and off. Wearing a cast made it impossible for her to ride" her ATV "until one day she had an opportunity to ride as a passenger in a side-by-side. We were so impressed with how safe this vehicle is. It has a full roll cage, seat belts and mirrors. My wife was perfectly safe, even wearing a cast. Two weeks later, we traded in her ATV for a new side-by-side, and we are having a ball. A pregnant woman could safely ride in one of these vehicles. We have seen families with young children riding in these buggies just enjoying the great outdoors with the rest of us.

"John, ATVing is a great recreational way to spend time with family and friends, and side-by-side or two-up ATVs should be included so more people can ride together and have fun. I really hope this ... passes for the betterment of the sport.

"Thank you for your time,

"John Vonk."

The problem is that these people were breaking the law. When people are forced to break the law for no real reason, that points to the law needing to be changed or updated. It's a big problem. What's most frustrating about this issue is that this could have been changed. The government is in full power. I would like to have my name on a bill saying that this passed, but what I would like a lot more is for the government, in the next month, to say, "You know what? We're going to change this regulation." My folks who use UTVs and rural people across—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And people in Glen Murray's riding.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm sure a few people in Glen Murray's riding use UTVs. So the people in rural Ontario, when the snow goes, or even when the snow is still here, can actually use UTVs where they are using them now illegally. That needs to be done.

Something I've heard a couple of times—I'd like to close with this—is that we have to be careful, because when we allow these machines we're going to have all kinds of new traffic problems. Well, ATVs have been legal for longer than a decade, and by and large the users have been responsible. People across rural Ontario have been very responsible. They've taken the privilege of using ATVs on roads very seriously. These same people are now asking for the right to use UTVs, and there is no reason to believe that they would take this right any less seriously.

This case is strictly about respecting the needs of the people of rural Ontario. I get more calls and more petitions, as do my colleagues, on this issue than on almost any other issue.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'll give you an example, okay? We have lots of snow in northern Ontario, right?

Interjections: Yes.

Mr. John Vanthof: So, in my riding—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I didn't know that.

Mr. John Vanthof: Give me a second. In my riding, someone put a blade on the front of the UTV to clean snow. Everyone has these, okay? He was charged. You cannot use a UTV on a street, so technically cleaning snow out of your laneway and backing onto the street is illegal. You can do it with an ATV; you can do it with a tractor; you can do it with a four-wheel-drive pickup; but lo, you can't do it with a UTV. Now, by far the majority of police officers are very understanding and look the other way.

Interjection: They have to.

Mr. John Vanthof: Right? But, at the end of the day, if something goes wrong, you are breaking the law. It's time that that changes. This government has the full power to act. They could do it. They may not be able to do it this afternoon, but they could do it on Monday. We need to change it, so that law-respecting, law-abiding people in rural Ontario can use these things without being forced to break the law.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I want to thank the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane for his passionate remarks on Bill 46. I'm really pleased to be able to speak to this bill today, and I hope that, when I hopefully someday come through your riding, you'll be able to take me out for a ride on that.

Interjection.

1530

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'll hold you to that. Okay.

As the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, I am particularly interested to hear what all members have to say regarding this topic. There has been a lot of interest in this topic of late. I know that at least right now, there are three private members' bills tabled relating to off-road vehicle use.

This is not a surprising fact when you take a good, close look at the figures. In 2013, there were 407,585 off-

road vehicles registered in Ontario. According to the Canadian Off-Highway Vehicle Distributors Council, over 11,000 of these were new ATVs that were sold in Ontario just in 2013 alone.

Every year, more and more people seem to be buying and using these types of vehicles all across the province. It's important that we balance this increase in usage with road safety.

I know I've said this a number of times in this House, but I really do believe that our government is truly proud of our record of having amongst the safest roads in North America. But we also know that there is more that we can do to improve road safety.

As always, keeping our roads safe is the highest priority for our government. That's why our government has taken a number of concrete actions to keep both drivers and ORV riders safe. MTO staff continue to work closely with more than 150 road safety partners to develop and implement public education initiatives at the community, regional and the provincial level. These partners include police agencies, injury prevention practitioners, ORV clubs and trail organizations from around the province. MTO staff and these partners attend annual trade shows, make public presentations, develop and distribute public education material, create community displays and deliver interactive programs to young riders in partnership with local secondary and elementary schools.

I'm particularly proud to say that a large component of these initiatives is promoting young rider safety. My son Alex, at age 12, decided at his first ride that he would shoot across a farmer's field with his friend in a side-by-side vehicle, and they immediately crashed. He has learned, during his first lesson, that having a road safety tip or two before he gets on a vehicle is an essential thing. He was unhurt.

It's well known that by educating youth on road safety early on, we can ensure that it becomes a habit for them as they become adults. Ontario's second annual ATV Safety Week will take place this year, in May 2015. MTO has actually launched four ATV safety videos to assist the public in learning how to safely operate their ORV. An online knowledge assessment tool has also been produced to allow riders to test their safety IQ.

All of these initiatives work in tandem with Ontario's first Smart Ride Safe Ride ATV guide, which was created and launched in 2011 to educate riders on the legislative requirements for both on-road and off-road use, and to promote safe and responsible riding practices. The guide is already available on the MTO website.

Many members of this House have already spoken in favour and contributed to the debate on Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer act. This bill not only serves to protect drivers on our roads; it also introduces a number of provisions that will keep pedestrians and cyclists safe in Ontario. I'm really pleased about the support that I've heard on all sides of this House for Bill 31.

If passed, it will also remove a legislated equipment requirement for ORV tire pressure that may affect the

ability of municipalities to pass future bylaws. The bill, if passed, will eliminate the prescriptive definition of low-pressure-bearing tires that could affect the future off-road bylaw authority of the municipalities.

With all of this in mind, I want to discuss more specifically Bill 46.

Bill 46 seeks to establish a requirement that regulations passed cannot restrict an ORV from being driven on a highway if it's designed to carry more than one passenger and where there's more than just a driver on the vehicle.

Currently, single-rider ATVs are permitted limited on-road access to slightly under 7,700 kilometres of provincial highways. All ORVs, including ATVs, in Ontario can directly cross a public road where permitted.

Ontario also allows single-rider ATVs the opportunity to travel along permitted provincial highways. Municipalities have the authority to determine whether or not single-rider ATVs should be allowed to access roads under their jurisdiction.

There are, understandably, safety concerns related to using ORVs, as there are when anyone attempts to drive any kind of vehicle.

MTO has identified some safety concerns with extending on-road access to all types of ORVs. However, we also recognize the importance of balancing these safety concerns with the potential economic, tourism and enhanced mobility benefits associated with the increased use of off-road vehicles.

That's why, at the direction of the Minister of Transportation, MTO has already been conducting extensive consultations on ORV use. In fact, our most recent consultation in mid-January saw MTO staff joined by almost 30 different stakeholder groups representing enforcement, municipalities, public health, industry, agricultural groups and trail organizations. I was there for that. A lot of the comments were very, very positive.

Based on the consultations, it's clear that stakeholders want government to be an active partner in the development of a modern ORV regulatory framework. That's why our government will continue to take positive steps forward on this issue. We'll continue to work with our municipal and road safety partners, as well as our industry and stakeholder partners, to ensure that we develop strong solutions for outstanding ORV-related issues, including extending on-road access for things like two-up ATVs, side-by-side ATVs and UTVs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill 46, which is An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect of off-road vehicles. It has a similar objective to a private member's bill which I'll be debating at this time next week, which is Bill 58, but it has a different approach. This bill would restrict permission to drive an off-road vehicle on a highway to vehicles that are designed to carry only a driver and no passengers.

Just a little bit of history, as was mentioned by the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane: Back in 2003, the

Highway Traffic Act was amended to allow ATVs on some designated provincial highways and to allow municipalities to decide if they want to allow ATVs on any of their roads or some of their roads. The definition of an ATV is very specific: It's one-person; you straddle it; it has four wheels. Since that time, we've seen all kinds of different vehicles developed. Typically, they're called UTVs: utility task vehicles.

As the member mentioned, he has a Polaris Ranger, which is a very popular UTV. It has a bench seat that three people can sit on. It has a pickup box in the back, so it's, as he mentioned, probably safer than an ATV. It's probably more popular with people who want to work with the ATV, because it can carry firewood. A senior who might have trouble using an ATV probably feels more comfortable on a UTV.

The way the rules are now, if you live in rural Parry Sound–Muskoka, say in one of the rural municipalities, even if the municipality has decided that they're fine with allowing ATVs on their roads—and these, in most cases, are dirt roads not very highly travelled. Say a resident owns a woodlot a kilometre down the road and wants to use his Polaris Ranger to access that woodlot; it's technically against the law. They're breaking the law to go a kilometre down the road to get on their woodlot to be able to cut some firewood. I've certainly heard from residents of Parry Sound–Muskoka who would like to see that changed, and it's something that I absolutely support.

The member mentioned something I hadn't thought of. I have a Kubota RTV with a blade in the front that I plow my driveway with, out in rural Bracebridge, about half an hour from the closest town, on a small dirt road where you don't see much traffic. As he pointed out, it's technically illegal for me to back on to the road to plow the opening to the driveway, something I hadn't thought of, which brings up another grey area, where you have a vehicle like a Kubota RTV, which is really tractor-based, and it could be considered an instrument of husbandry and have a slow-moving-vehicle sign on it, and may be legal, depending on the interpretation of the officer.

1540

I know we have two other members who would like to speak to this. I would simply say that in the intersession I went around to quite a few municipalities, particularly in the Parry Sound district—the more rural ones—and they're in favour of updating the rules. I've heard from lots of people who are in favour of updating the rules. We had a motion passed by the House last year.

My experience in Quebec is that they're generally way ahead of us on trails policy. They actually plow trails for ATVs in the wintertime. I'm not sure how much sense that makes, but they do that—I've witnessed that. They allow UTVs in their small towns. You can drive down to the restaurant, and I've seen that. But they also seem to be ahead of us on cycling trails. They have the Route Verte and the transprovincial trails.

I'm going to stop now, because we have two other members. I'd just say that I am supportive of this, and I

look forward to speaking further next week as well to my own private member's bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I am rising, of course, to support the legislation that was tabled by the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

This is an issue that I think all members of this House have agreed needs to be dealt with. It is something that rural Ontarians have been talking about for some time. People around here say they have been listening to the voices of rural Ontarians. The problem is, they don't act on the voices of rural Ontarians.

Next week, in fact, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association and the Ontario Good Roads Association are meeting here in Toronto. They're coming from all across Ontario to talk about rural issues and rural concerns. We know that this issue has come up every time those folks have talked to us for the last several years, and yet here we are with a government that continues to drag its feet on this particular change.

A UTV is pretty much the type of vehicle that is utilized by all kinds of folks in northern Ontario and rural Ontario. In fact, I had the opportunity myself, through the good graces of the MPP from Timiskaming—Cochrane, to drive a UTV. It was something that was necessary for me to be able to undertake a particular task that needed to be undertaken when I was in rural Ontario. For me, I see this as no big deal whatsoever. There is lots of foot-dragging, lots of barriers being put up, but no real action on something that's quite easy to address.

I want to thank the member for bringing this up yet again here in the House. I would hope it gets not only the support it had from every party the last time it was here, but that it gets support from the government and the government actually moves on it.

I remember when the current Premier decided she was going to be the critic for agriculture and rural affairs—the minister, rather, not the critic; the minister for agriculture and rural affairs. I thought it was oh-so-cute when she donned her little red boots in the photo op, because she was now going to be the minister of agriculture and rural affairs. Well, Speaker, I think it's time that that Premier dusted off those little red boots and kicked some butt over on the other side so that this piece of legislation can be passed and we can finally deal with the anomaly that exists here, where UTVs are not allowed to be used and utilized in the same way as ATVs are in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I also want to commend my friend from Timiskaming—Cochrane. This is a very equitable bill, and I appreciate your bringing it forward.

I've said many times in this House that I've always believed this place is overly partisan. I always try to get my House duty on Thursday afternoon, because it's that one time we can be MPPs first and work on things that I think are of concern to all Ontarians.

If you look at the history of this very fine place, back to the days of Agnes Macphail and Robert Baldwin, this place used to have a very different character—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: —and there was a time when you could actually make a speech without a party leader interrupting you. But I want to go back, because this is an important issue.

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You'll notice I sat quietly and listened when you guys were speaking this afternoon. I have a non-interference rule, because God knows we do that to each other. It's a good thing.

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's a good thing.

The member, right now, sits beside the member from Parkdale—High Park. We worked together very well on things like the one-metre rule for cyclists. We've worked very well with the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka. Those things are now working their way through the House, right? We all understand, because we all share responsibility—when we use words like "foot-dragging," we should be careful how we do that.

When we did that road user safety bill that's now before the House again—I think it has got five private members' bills in it, if I remember correctly. Only one of them is from the government side. Right now, as environment minister, I'm going through all of the private members' bills that have been tabled by all members of this House. I've started meeting with some of you one-on-one—the same thing I did when I was transportation minister—to bring these things forward. As I said privately—and I won't repeat it, because there are some issues with doing this exactly now. There are some environmental concerns; there are some safety concerns.

When I was transportation minister, I held a series of round tables at ROMA and AMO. We had, I think, about 17 municipalities, both rural and urban, participating in that. Some of them are looking for some things that have some complexity to them.

Not only will I vote for this today—because this is the third bill like this—because I think it's fundamentally right, but I also went over and talked to the member one-on-one. I am very happy to work with you and the Minister of Transportation to sort that out.

We do have some other overarching issues that I know are of concern to the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane and his colleagues. One of them is climate change. We're rapidly heading for four degrees Celsius. We've had some discussions with members opposite. You look at what happened in the UK or New Zealand or Norway, where they decided that climate change, as an issue, was too important to be a partisan issue and they started working at that.

We did this on cycling. We've done this on a number of issues. I'm quite sincerely offering to support that. Maybe we can work together to work out some of the environmental concerns, some of the municipal concerns and some of the safety concerns.

I want to say that we're working right now—I think, again, it's another thing we agree on, your seatmate from Parkdale—High Park and the member from Toronto—Danforth—we worked on electrification. We celebrate now that we're now moving, over the next decade, to completely electrify all of the GO system. That's now under way. That plan is being staged. That's very, very exciting, I think. It's not just Union Pearson Express now; it's the whole thing. That's also now moving forward in this budget.

I always think we treat each other as intelligent people and we try to work on these things together. Those are not things that happen in months. Have we been working hard on this? Yes. Is there a reason that the law hasn't been changed instantaneously? It's because there are still some substantive issues that have to be worked out, and I think, working together, we can do that.

As my Jewish friends say, mazel tov—a good thing. I plan on voting for this today. I hope we can try and improve the environmental performance of some of these vehicles.

I just want to say one last thing, Mr. Speaker. This is not a rural or urban thing. Do you know how many people who live in my constituency actually drive ATVs and snowmobiles and have cottages? I lived in Alexandria on a dairy farm. I couldn't get around. These aren't recreational vehicles. For a lot of folks, these are vehicles. You can imagine living in Manitoba, with all that flat land.

The leader of the third party—I give her credit for riding in an ATV. Sometimes you have to do it, but it's darned fun to go fast. There's something about it. I feel like I'm an eight-year-old kid, like when you played Hot Wheels and you sent them zipping. You actually get to drive one of these things. It's kick-ass fun, Mr. Speaker, and there's nothing wrong with having kick-ass fun times. It's important.

Let's work together on this. Good leadership. Thank you very much to my friend across the way.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'll start off by saying I'm going to support my good friend from Timiskaming—Cochrane on this, and also my colleague Norm Miller from Parry Sound—Muskoka, who will be bringing out a similar bill next week which will have pertinent and normal information that we want to pass and get on with this.

I want to start off—the parliamentary assistant said she'd like to be able to go up and take a ride with the member at some point. I think maybe if she'd do this right away and we'd get charged by the OPP, this might become a priority of the government on the opposite side to actually change and see how ludicrous it is.

Just before the former minister leaves—I think it's interesting to know that he talks about working together, but it was him that didn't get this done when it was passed. Back in 2013, motion 48 was put forward by the good member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and had the right intention. Regrettably, that Minister of Trans-

portation ignored it and didn't get it passed. Now, today, he's saying it's a wonderful thing and we should have passed it at some point. Why isn't it there? The rubber needs to hit the road.

1550

Here we are debating something that this government should have done, could have done and we wouldn't even be talking about it. It's ludicrous that people in areas—like in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, we have lots of farmers, hunters, fishermen, people from the city who come up for tourism purposes to do this and they may need to go on to the road to get to their bushlot. They may need to use it to get to a farm from another piece of property. It's unbelievable that we're playing games with stuff like this at the end of the day.

We have people who ride two-up ATVs, side-by-side UTVs and, as I said, many people coming from the more urban areas, who come to an area like the beautiful Bruce Peninsula to be able to ride their ATVs, to be able to clear snow like we've heard today—a safety issue for emergency personnel to get in and they're going to get charged because they back up onto a gravel road. How ludicrous is it that we actually play these types of games?

At the end of the day, we have to stop putting motions forward and putting bills forward that we say we're going to pass and then we find ways to drag our feet and not make it happen. I'm hopeful that this government will be sincere and truly look at the safety perspective, look at what the impingement of this is on people's rights.

At the end of the day, if you can ride an ATV, why can't you ride a UTV in the areas where there are needs to get to other properties, where you have to cross a road, travel on a road to get to a trail, to get to that recreational opportunity? We need to be able to do that.

This is about families. Don Calvert, a paraplegic father from Sault Ste. Marie, and his daughter, Brittany, are one such family that's looking forward to the day when this Liberal government will make it legal for them to just turn on their side-by-side and head to the trails. I certainly hope the new minister will be mindful of his duty to protect all road users, including those people such as the Calverts.

Mr. Speaker, it's pretty simple. We have an ability here to change something that we all agree is wrong. Let's expedite it. Let's move it through the House and make something of value for the people of Ontario and maximize our time here to get on to the other issues that we need to be speaking about.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will add a few minutes to the debate. I can tell you that in my riding, ATV trails are really a source of tourism. We have some beautiful trails in Nickel Belt. I encourage you to come and visit Nickel Belt. You can rent a UTV right there. They will show you how to drive it. It's easy. You will go to places in the bush that you will never have had the opportunity to see before. Especially when the ground is frozen, you can go over mush. You can go over all sorts of places and see

the beauty of what northern Ontario looks like. In the summer, the fall, the winter or the spring, it makes no difference. Those vehicles have really opened up tourism opportunities, and we are doing good.

I must say, though, that the ATVs, the first of those that came out, were not that safe. They were meant for one person, but you could buy a seat to make it a two-person, which a lot of people did. There had been quite a few accidents, unfortunately, because they were made for one person, but two would ride on it and bad things have happened. But with the UTV, they are so much safer. They are easy to drive. You don't need any strength. You don't need any special anything. You just need to see where you're going and away you go. They don't go that fast. In the bush, they will climb anything.

So why don't we do this? Why do we keep saying you have to keep using the more dangerous vehicle if you want to be able to do something as simple as cross the road, because when you go through the bush, every now and again you will come to a road, and if you cross the road, you are breaking the law? If you're on an ATV, you're not breaking the law; if you're on a UTV, you are breaking the law—not obvious.

Why don't we change this so that those vehicles don't break the law? Will there be restrictions on them? Absolutely. I don't want them on the 401. That would make no sense whatsoever, but on Regional Road 55 in Walden, absolutely. There's no question that they would be welcome.

For tourism reasons, for safety reasons, let's pass this—the sooner the better.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today—

Applause.

Ms. Laurie Scott: —and to receive a round of applause from the government side—on the issue of amending the Highway Traffic Act for off-road vehicles. It has been a huge topic in my riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I know that the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka has brought it up before, and members from the government side have brought it up before. Basically we're saying that it's time to modernize the Highway Traffic Act so that these vehicles, whether they be called just off-road vehicles or utility, task and all-terrain vehicles—as you said, people have been fined for plowing.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has done a great job of this with the examples he gave of someone plowing out their driveway, backing out into a highway and being fined. That's absolutely ridiculous. It's something that has taken several years, and we've advocated on so many occasions in the Legislature. Now all three parties sound supportive.

Just the fact that more and more people are using these, whether it be farmers or people on their way to work—you can use them up in our neck of the woods, as

I can say. Hunters, riders, accessing recreational purposes—I am the critic for tourism, culture and sport, and we need it for tourism.

Interjection: It's huge for tourism.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's a huge tourism catch.

Argos, I know, are made in my colleague from Kitchener–Conestoga's riding. They won many, many awards. They're hardly legal to be used. They're a very good Canadian company, and we're very proud of that and the jobs they produce, so it is definitely overdue.

It's a regulation change. I know that the Minister of Transportation spoke in favour of it—well, the former Minister of Transportation, now the minister of climate change. He spoke to supporting it, but when he was the Minister of Transportation we would have given him praise for bringing that in. It was something that we all agree on. I think it's time when the example has been brought up that the province of Quebec has already allowed this to take place. Then we get into vying for tourists, people who are hunters, or anything that they can use these vehicles for legally in Quebec that we cannot here.

I know that my colleague the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka is going to debate a similar bill next week here in the Legislature, maybe with a different angle as to how to get to the end result, but we're all in agreement. We're all on the same side today.

Interjection: They both benefit.

Ms. Laurie Scott: They both benefit. I say that this would be extremely helpful. I know that I have ATV associations up in Haliburton and Kawartha Lakes that have both been very vocal on seeing this go through. I'm just trying to find their names here—I might be able to in a second—but they have been promoting this use. They have been getting petitions signed. I would hazard to say that those who use the off-roads have all broken a few laws the way they stand, and we're in the good graces of the OPP and the municipal police forces, that just turn the other cheek so that they are not compromised for an outdated law that exists. An update would help and benefit all of us.

Mr. Bill Walker: The Bruce and Grey ATV clubs really want this.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes. The Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound ATV clubs mentioned by my colleague behind me are fully supportive of it; obviously all ATV clubs are. I don't have a current statistic, but at one point all-terrain vehicles were outselling snowmobiles five to one. I think that's just a reality of the times in which we live, and they are allowed to come onto some of our roads in some of our municipalities—not all. It has enhanced the tourism dollars, the adventures that can take place up in Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

So, all parties being in agreement today, if we could put a due date for the government to act on this, it doesn't even have to be debated anymore—after next week, of course, for the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, but it's just a regulation change. I commend the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for bringing this forward

again. Let's see how many times we can strike it lucky. I hope today is your day, that we'll pass it, but let's see if it gets into law. Thank you for bringing that forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Michael Mantha: As critic for northern development, mines and transportation for our party, it is with great pleasure and honour that I add my comments to this debate. I always stand wholeheartedly to speak on behalf of individuals across Algoma-Manitoulin. The one city, 37 municipalities, 15 unorganized areas and 24 First Nations that are there are all asking for this bill. It is so important to the area, and I speak about this—

Interjections.

1600

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I get a little bit of order, please?

Mr. Michael Mantha: —from a perspective of tourism, I speak of this in regard to economic development and I speak about this wholeheartedly from small-town recreation and family activity that will really bring people and communities together.

You have to understand that these trails, these roadways, are arteries across northern Ontario—actually, quite frankly, across this province—arteries. They're the bloodline. When these individuals travel—and at one time they were on their ATVs and you would have groups of anywhere between 20 people to 25 people on their ATVs. That means hotel rooms; that means gasoline; that means gift shops—that means people spending money in your community. That's what we need across northern Ontario right at this time, because it is difficult to attract people up there.

But here's the gift that this could do—here in the greater Toronto area you're blessed with having beautiful museums, beautiful recreation facilities. You have the Rogers Centre, you have movie theatres, you have Canada's Wonderland. Do you want to know what our Wonderland is? It's our parks; it's our woods; it's our forests; it's our trails; it's our lakes. That's what we have.

When you have individuals who are being restricted as far as accessing these areas, that's a problem in itself, but accessing them legally is also a big problem for individuals across northern Ontario. This will change that. You have individuals who have got to an age in their life where they physically cannot drive the ATV. Thank goodness we have the UTVs now so that many grandpas and grandmas can actually jump in their vehicles, bring their grandchildren with them and have an activity they can all go out and enjoy. It is such a pleasant family event that people can go out and have a beautiful and wonderful day doing.

What I do want to tell you is that the police officers, particularly in my area, are very lenient with individuals. Although they make sure that the people are abiding by the laws, they make sure that if they observe a violation, they actually follow that individual home. Here's the kicker, Mr. Speaker: They'll follow that individual home, they'll get to his driveway, they will get out of their

vehicle, they will walk up to this individual and they will inform him that he has broken the law. Most of these individuals are basically saying, "Well, why? What did I do?" So the explanation goes out.

Do you want to know what they're saying? The police officers of this province know that we are trying to solve this problem. They're telling them, "I want you to go tell your MPP, I want to you go tell Michael Mantha, that I came to your driveway today, observed you, watching at your home, so that they know that we know that this needs to be corrected."

We talked about this extensively, under Bill 31, with the Minister of Transportation. I was quite pleased to hear that there's a particular part under Bill 31 that is a cleanup that addresses the issue in regard to the pressure that is within the tires, which is apparently going to lay the path in order to change the regulations to get this done.

Let's get it done. This is a no-brainer bill. This is not a difficult task. The minister can do this. It's a regulation change. We should look at doing it as quickly as possible. I appreciate the consultation that has gone on, which the member from Cambridge alluded to earlier. She keeps saying, "We're taking steps forward." Heck, let's take a leap. Let's get this done. It should have been done a long time ago. Let's get it resolved, because it's that important to communities across northern Ontario.

Again, I say that the tourism industry is a very fragile one in northern Ontario. This is something where people can actually help with their communities, create jobs and improve economic development. That, Mr. Speaker, is a very important issue across this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M. Gilles Bisson: Monsieur le Président, j'ai écouté attentivement le débat, puis je pense que c'est clair que la plupart des députés dans l'Assemblée sont d'accord avec ce projet de loi. Ils disent, « Écoute, la situation est telle que ça n'a plus de bon sens. » La loi courante ne reflète pas les réalités de la situation avec ces véhicules.

Moi, je le sais. Quand je parle au monde dans mon comté, à Hearst ou à Kap ou à Timmins, c'est toujours le même. Ils se disent : « Écoute, j'ai mon ATV. Je peux aller n'importe où avec. Mais quand ça vient à mon side-by-side »—c'est comme ça qu'on parle en français : « ATV », « side-by-side ». Ils se disent : « Ça ne fait pas de bon sens parce que le side-by-side est beaucoup plus sûr qu'un ATV et aussi beaucoup plus pratique. » Il y a bien de monde qui s'en sert pour charrier un peu de bois, qui met une pelle en avant pour nettoyer la neige, ou qui se transportent d'un point à l'autre quand ça vient à la chasse ou la pêche sur les chemins au nord de l'Ontario.

Donc, je suis content que ça a l'air de la majorité ou même peut-être l'unanimité de la Chambre, les députés. Si c'est le cas, je demanderais, comme M. Vanthof l'a demandé, que le gouvernement fasse ça vite. Écoute, ce n'est pas une question d'avoir besoin d'étudier la question pour bien longtemps. C'est une question que le gouvernement peut changer un règlement et être capable

de changer l'autorité nécessaire pour accéder aux demandes de M. Vanthof.

De la part de tous les citoyens de mon comté, on veut le remercier pour avoir amené ce projet de loi devant nous.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane. You have two minutes.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank all my honourable colleagues who spoke on behalf of this issue. I heard lots of agreement.

There was one interesting comment about how this has an environmental connotation. I have the, I guess, opportunity of living right next to the Quebec border. If someone in Virginiatown on my side of the border, on the Ontario side of the border, wants to go hunting with his UTV, he needs to go over half a mile of highway. To be legal, he has to pull out his truck, hook up his trailer, put the UTV on the trailer, move the truck a mile, start and stop, while the guy on the Quebec side starts his ATV and drives. Now, which is more environmentally friendly? I'd say: the people on the Quebec side. If you really want to talk about environment, that's more environmentally friendly.

But the issue, again, and I don't think I can reinforce this enough: We can't be standing here year after year saying something's a problem and we could easily fix it, and not do it. And study it. And say, "We have to look at safety." Well, Quebec has already looked at the safety concerns. They're doing it. This is an issue about respect for the tools that people in rural Ontario need.

Here we're talking about electrifying trains. In Timiskaming—Cochrane they just announced they're closing the bus stations in Matheson and Englehart. If we're not careful, UTVs will be the only thing we have left. In rural Ontario, we're sick of listening to people talk about our concerns and then turning around and ignoring them. You want to show that you have concern for rural Ontario? The things that can be fixed easily without a massive amount of study should be fixed, and fixing the UTV situation is one of them. A majority government could do it now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

PROTECTING INTERNS AND CREATING A LEARNING ECONOMY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DES STAGIAIRES ET LA CRÉATION D'UNE ÉCONOMIE D'APPRENTISSAGE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 25, standing in the name of Ms. Sattler.

Ms. Sattler has moved second reading of Bill 64, An Act to amend the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act and the Employment Standards Act, 2000.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), Ms. Sattler?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Legislative Assembly, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to Legislative Assembly. Agreed? Agreed. So referred.

SERVICE CLUBS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Wilson has moved private member's notice of motion number 16.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (OFF-ROAD VEHICLES), 2015

LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (VÉHICULES TOUT TERRAIN)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Vanthof has moved second reading of Bill 46, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act in respect of off-road vehicles.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

1610

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j)—Mr. Vanthof?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to refer to general government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to general government. Agreed? Agreed. So moved.

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 18, 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 Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): When this item of business was last debated, the member for Nipissing had the floor with time remaining on the clock.

Further debate.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm happy to get up and speak about Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act. I'm happy to speak about it.

We have a retirement savings crisis in this province. We have a lack-of-a-defined-benefit-pension-plan problem in this province as well. This isn't news, and it's certainly not good news.

As early as the 1990s, we had a lot of good-paying jobs in this province, but we saw, since the early and mid-1990s, those jobs start to dwindle away. Many of those jobs had pension plans, pensions that actually could support families in this province.

Because many of those jobs have now become precarious work, temporary work, contract work, people cannot afford to contribute money to RRSPs. They can hardly afford to live because of the kinds of jobs that are available to many Ontarians today.

So although I support this bill in principle, I look forward to a time that we can see how we can actually strengthen the bill and improve it and make sure that, when it moves through the legislative process, it has everything that it needs to make sure that Ontario's seniors have the protections they need when they retire. I would be remiss if I did not note that this ORPP legislation largely mirrors the Ontario retirement plan that the NDP proposed early in 2010.

As we all know, Ontarians do not have workplace pensions—many of them. Two thirds of them, in fact, do not have a workplace pension. As the New Democrat for community and social services, I can't help but be reminded on a daily basis, with the emails I receive, the phone calls I receive from all over the province—seniors who have faced too many obstacles day in and day out to even allow them to contribute to a pension plan during their working years.

Just yesterday I received a phone call, actually, from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo's riding, from a man by the name of Paul. He called in to talk about this legislation. I happened to answer the phone and have a lengthy discussion with him. A man who was injured in an accident, currently he is on ODSP. He survives on seven credit cards a month. The bank sends you credit cards every month, and all you've got to do is sign on the dotted line, and you've got that \$500 or \$1,000 initial credit card—

Mr. Michael Mantha: They don't dare send me any.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I know they won't send you any.

Anyway, he lives on his credit cards. He robs Peter to pay Paul at the end of each month. He's wondering what the Liberal government—what we're actually going to do for people on ODSP who live in poverty day in and day out. He had a great idea. He said that the government talks about getting people on ODSP back into the workforce, and perhaps they should be looking at providing some training and offering government jobs that are

vacant to people on ODSP. There are lots of government jobs in this province, and as they become vacant, that would be a way to get people who maybe have some physical restrictions back into the workplace. But he said the answer that he actually got when he called the Premier's office and talked to the Premier's staff was, "The government can't afford to give you people on ODSP any more money. We're moving forward with this pension plan for people who are in the workforce." But Paul said to me, "Well, that won't help me." He wanted me to talk about that today when I stood up here.

As such, I can't help but look at the actual act from this lens and ensure that whatever we do serves the interests of all Ontarians, including those who are often left on the margins and who most need the help. As we know, there are too many Ontarians with insufficient workplace pensions struggling to make ends meet. It's up to us, the members in this House, the legislators, to ensure that we have a progressive defined benefit public pension plan that ensures our seniors can retire with dignity. The only way to do that is with a defined benefit plan.

We have the opportunity here to build something that will serve and protect all workers at all stages of their careers, be it young people entering the workforce, mid-career professionals or those nearing retirement.

Some of my fellow colleagues spoke yesterday. Certainly our pension critic from Oshawa, Ms. French, spoke quite well on the subject of ORPPs and PRPPs, and I just wanted to add a few comments to what we heard yesterday. We know that there are going to be three pieces of legislation and this is the first. The second bill will be responsible for administration and management, and the third will deal with all of the details.

I think my message here today, Speaker, is: Let's make sure we actually get those details worked out and make sure we hear from all the stakeholders, from all the people who have something to say about this, before we actually put in legislation that can negatively impact people in the province.

The ORPP is supposed to be phased in by January 1, 2017, and essentially ensures that the employer and employees would contribute a percentage—1.9% each, I believe—to this plan, to a maximum income level of \$90,000. But the bill doesn't say what the minimum income level is going to be, and that is problematic because, in my view, those are the people who are going to need that pension more than people at the top end of the scale. I think that needs to be defined sooner rather than later.

These are the people who, because they're earning lower wages, have never had the opportunity to invest in an RRSP or put away any savings. For those employees who earn less than \$70,000 in annual income, the ORPP will end up being less of a benefit than CPP. It only becomes comparable for those high-wage income earners, Speaker, and that hardly seems fair to me. It would also certainly be significantly less in benefits provided by public sector defined benefit pension plans and the broader public sector plans as well.

The bill stipulates that ORPP benefits would not be eligible to those who have a comparable defined benefit plan. If so, what defines comparable plans, and will defined contribution plans and pooled registered pension plans be included in that definition? I don't think that is entirely clear yet. I believe there is some lobby to certainly try to exclude on one side and perhaps include on the other side.

Almost half of all Ontario workers are in some form of comparable plan if you include the pooled registered pension plans and mandatory and volunteer RRSP contributions that many workplaces still have. How would this affect them? Would they be better off with an ORPP, or would they be forced to make double contributions?

The point came to mind today that I don't think I have heard in any of the debate yet: What about spousal contributions? Is there going to be a spousal contribution in this ORPP? Certainly, under defined benefit plans, there is a spousal contribution and, depending on the plan, you can sign off for a lower amount of benefits, for 100% benefit left to your spouse or 60% or 80%, depending on the plan. I can tell you, Speaker, that coming from a steel town where many factory jobs have closed, in the private sector pension plans, workers were able to sign their spouses off of their pension plans so they would get a greater amount of pension at the end of the day. But guess what, Speaker? Many of them dropped dead within a year of retiring, and all of those pooled pension monies stayed in the pool, and the spouses ended up living in poverty for the rest of their lives. I see those people in my office every day, and I still see the erosion of those pension plans happening in the steel industry in particular. So that is problematic.

1620

The other issue that came to my mind was, what will happen if people go into the PRPP and they have, I don't know, \$10,000 in that pooled plan? Are they going to be allowed to convert that and take that into the ORPP? It seems to me they could buy back some of their years of service in their workplace by doing that. That certainly happens in the defined benefit plans today. You can be in the HOOPP plan, you can go over and work in a workplace that has OMERS, and you can actually transfer those OMERS dollars to HOOPP and vice versa. I think there needs to be some consideration that if people are going to go into these pooled RPPs to start with, there needs to be some guarantee that they're going to be able to move those dollars into a defined benefit system at the end of the day.

I want to tell you one little story, and it's actually a personal story about my spouse. He was in the OMERS plan for a number of years, and then he was out on a leave of absence in another job where they made 10% contributions to an RRSP for him. At the end of the day, the benefit amount when he retired was probably about the same as he would have had through OMERS. But guess what? There was no spousal benefit left. So when he's gone, that benefit is gone. That's one more reason to have a defined benefit plan with a spousal benefit.

I also wanted to talk about what happens when you change pension plans. This actually happened under the Mike Harris government. You'll remember that home care back in the 1990s was administered, through the Minister of Health, by municipalities. All of those health care professionals, IT people and clerical workers had their pension in OMERS. When the Conservative government introduced the CCACs as a way of improving the system, reducing dollars, they then became covered under HOOPP. So they now have two side-by-side pension plans. That resulted in a class action lawsuit that took many, many years, and just in the last few years did it get settled. There was no decision from the court; the parties settled. At the end of the day, there are many health care workers through that system who have a much lower pension on retirement—some have quoted me as much as \$500 a month—because they were not able to combine those two pension plans. The settlement was a measly \$5,000 per employee. If you, as a nurse, for example, were out \$500 because of your years of service and your years of contributions—if you live eight years past your retirement, you're out up to \$500 a month for the rest of your life. That can be significant dollars. It could run into \$100,000, if you live to a ripe old age like my mother of soon-to-be 90.

So there are lots of things to consider when we're talking about these pension issues.

How are we going to address the portability piece from the pooled investments or from other pension plans? We know that there are varying opinions on this issue. There are certainly some stakeholders saying we should take 1.9% from employees and 1.9% from employers from these defined benefit plans like HOOPP and OMERS, and move that into the ORPP, so it would be a universal plan. But I think that at the end of the day, that would result in reduced benefits on a monthly basis for people who are now in a secure pension plan. I think the goal here is to ensure some pension security for all, not to reduce the pension security of people who currently have a secure pension and have the ability to continue to spend in their communities and spur on the economy.

Yesterday, I had the opportunity to speak to somebody who is somewhat of an expert in the pension field. He talked to me about the existing public sector defined benefit plans like HOOPP, OMERS, OPSEU Pension Trust and Teachers', and about how these pensions are administered. They're administered under a joint administrative system. I would hope there would be something similar set up under the ORPP. Under those plans, you have workers, you have employers and you have unions all sitting on the pension board. It's that group that actually makes the decisions on how the pension benefits will be improved in the coming years.

Something I didn't know was that under defined benefit plans, actually 70% of the benefits provided to retirees come from investments and not contributions. I think it's important to note that, because if there is any move to reduce the amount of contributions by that 3.8%, there will be less dollars to be invested, so the end result

will be a negative outcome for the people who are expecting their pensions to be secure.

Just to wrap up in my last three minutes, the point I'm trying to make is that we need to do this right. This is a very complex issue, with all different kinds of pension plans across this province, be it defined benefit, defined contribution, voluntary or mandatory RRSPs, or just your own personal RRSP, and we have some time.

I'm glad to see that our priority is to ensure that the hard-working families in this province are the priority and that building the legislative infrastructure will ensure that our seniors and their families can retire in dignity. As it stands, not enough can, and too many are left struggling to pay for their household needs like housing, food and spiralling hydroelectric bills, and are forced to work well into their later years to make ends meet.

Just last week, I was speaking to a nurse in my riding who hadn't contributed to the pension plan, although she had worked in the Niagara Health System for 30-some years. I asked her when she was going to retire, and she said, "Not until I'm at least 65, because I didn't contribute to my pension plan, and now I don't have enough money to retire. So I'm going to have to stay and work it out till the end." So it's important that we encourage people to contribute to pension plans.

We've seen this government waste billions of dollars on scandal after scandal because of reckless approaches around a number of issues: P3s, for example, \$8 billion; privatizing and contracting out services; wasting money on eHealth; a couple of billion dollars on the Ornge scandal; gas plants; Presto—you name it, and there has been a huge waste of money. I think that is because you don't do the work up front. You pass the legislation, you pass the policy, and then you try to figure it out later.

1630

I think this is a good opportunity; with this bill coming in three pieces, we're going to have lots of time to actually talk about it. I hope that every member of this House brings their story here to the Legislature so that we can work out all of the wrinkles in advance.

My last parting thought is, we have a number of well-established pension plans here in this province. Has the government given any thought to letting those pension plans actually administer this new ORPP? They're the ones, some of them with fully funded pension plans, who have the expertise. Why would we be going out and putting together a new management system for this plan when we have many experts in this field who have been in the pension business for many, many years? I urge you to turn your mind to perhaps seeking them out.

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

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I'm delighted to rise and speak for the two minutes that I have.

About 25 years ago, I was the Minister of Financial Institutions. One of the things that we dealt with was the pension plan. There was a defined benefit plan and a defined contribution plan, and most people had no idea what the difference was. A defined benefit plan states

that when you retire, you will get an amount of money that is known to you. It tells you right in your plan that this is what you're going to get. If you have a defined contribution plan, it means you put the money in, it is managed, and whatever it yields, you get. If it isn't managed properly, you don't get a lot of money. If it's managed properly, you get a lot more.

One of the big problems is that, at the present time, only 35% of people in the workforce have a pension, whether it be a defined benefit or a defined contribution. When you talk to young people who are working, they say, "I'm not going to worry about that now. That's way off into the future. I'll worry about it then." Well, if you don't worry about it now, that money is not going to be there in the future because there's always some other priority. It's absolutely critical.

I have constituents come into my office and they tell me they've got a Canada Pension Plan and what they get is about \$12,500 a year. Now, I can tell you that anyone who retires and that's the only income that they have, is really in very, very bad shape. The Premier has approached the federal government to suggest that the easiest way to do it would be to augment the Canada Pension Plan. There was a straight refusal to do that. There was no interest in doing that. She felt that she really had to go forward and bring forward this particular plan. As we work through it, there's going to be things that have to be adjusted, but I think it is absolutely imperative that we take the responsibility to make sure that people will have that income when they retire.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to commend the member from Welland for her comments. I was listening intently. She mentioned dwindling jobs—I'm quoting her—and that we have a saving crisis. She's right; we do have a crisis. You could say it's a saving crisis and you could even say it would be certainly nice if everybody had a great pension, but the reality is that the best saving for your retirement is a good job. The best way to save for your retirement is to manage your money. As the member from York Centre said, that money has to be managed properly. I think we have to start educating the public about debt, about taking on too big a mortgage, about saving for their retirement. Who better to show them than us, the people in this Legislature right here, right now?

The member from Welland also mentioned the billions of dollars in waste that we've seen from this government over the last decade. That is not setting an example. I think that too many young families in this province did not even have parents who grew up in the Depression; it was their grandparents. Those of us with parents who grew up in the Depression were constantly being told, "You have to save. You have to put away. Don't take on too much debt. Pay that credit card balance every month. Don't shop until you have that balance back down to zero."

It's imperative that we set an example, that we ensure that the crisis ends for the economics of the province. It's

not just a crisis in retirement; it's a crisis of economics; it's a crisis of deficit; it's a crisis of—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins–James Bay, would you please come to order?

Mrs. Gila Martow: Exactly. I hope that they're saving.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to have a quick two minutes to add my voice again to this debate.

I thank my colleague from Welland for her thoughtful comments. To some of her points about comparability and portability: These are important issues, not just details, that need to be considered very carefully. As I said yesterday, we're glad that the government is taking counsel and taking the advice, hopefully, of the people that they're consulting with and that we see what these details are as this process unfolds over the next pieces of legislation and that those decisions are not made just in regulations. We want to know what this will look like before that stage.

Today my colleague presented Bill 64, protecting unpaid interns. We're hearing about the economic realities of our students and of the next generation of workers, those individuals who should be working, who should be able to start making plans for their future. There are just so many layers to consider, and I think that was an important piece that does connect to the pension puzzle.

As far as managing your money and learning how best to save or to pay off debt before you take on more debt, these are great ideas, and these are things that people should learn. As I said yesterday, I come from an education background, and I know the value of teaching strategies and skills. I think we need to not only set an example here, but we need to recognize the realities outside of this Legislature: that people could teach us about managing money; that they are stretching a dollar much further than many of us have ever had to consider. I think they can educate us about how to move ahead and how best to design this pension plan.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I did enjoy what I thought was a very thoughtful, articulate and common-sense speech from the member for Welland.

It's interesting. As I was consulting last Saturday, I was with my friends at the East City Coffee Shop in Peterborough, where you can still get a great western sandwich for \$4.50. You throw a 50-cent tip in, so you give Mr. Sina five bucks, which is good. The topic of conversation there was the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Based on the consensus at the East City Coffee Shop, which is on Hunter Street East in Peterborough, right near the lift lock—great spot—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the member for Hamilton Mountain come to order?

Hon. Jeff Leal: What they said there is that they're in favour of this, and I'm glad to see the member for Welland is on board.

If you want to roll back the clock, 51 years ago, when the Prime Minister of the day, the father of the Canadian flag, the great Lester Pearson, introduced the Canada Pension Plan bill in the House of Commons, the tired rhetoric that we hear from the loyal opposition was the same rhetoric that John Diefenbaker, George Hees and that whole gang had against the Canada Pension Plan. So it's the same old story that we're hearing from them: that it's going to kill jobs.

Mr. Speaker, this is about planning for the future. The member from Welland and the third party have got it right. They're going to support this. This is an investment in the people of the province of Ontario and something we need to do.

The negativity—as I said, they should get the speeches from the House of Commons. It's great reading. I did it over the holidays. Fifty-one years ago—the tired rhetoric. You can take the member from Oxford and the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and replace them with the Tories who were in Ottawa representing the same ridings 51 years ago. The stories were exactly the same: doom and gloom.

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I say to my friends across now that they should give back the Canada pension if they don't think it's a good idea for Ontario, because it's great for Ontario, as this pension plan will be for all Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I go back to the member from Welland. You have two minutes for a reply.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I say to the minister of culture and rural affairs—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Culture? Food.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Food and rural affairs. Food and—anyway, whatever it is, don't be using my time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister, come to order.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I say, a good advertisement today, and where can I buy some cheap tires in Peterborough?

The members from York Centre, Thornhill and Oshawa, thank you for your comments. The private investing market has not been great over the last 20 years. People haven't done that well investing their money in the market; right?

I agree with the member from York Centre: The CPP federally is the best option. Good jobs are important; however, we don't have any. I think people who are in debt know best how they got into debt, and many of them got into debt because they lost their jobs, and in order to not lose their house and everything else they had, they had to take on credit card debt, like the guy I talked about today. He uses seven different credit cards just to get through his month to subsidize his paltry ODSP payment. It's like the school of hard knocks over here from the Conservatives.

We certainly are going to be supporting a pension plan. We want it to be, though, the right pension plan, a defined benefit plan that people can count on and be secure in in their futures.

In closing, I'll just say that I'm glad to see that the government is actually doing something for Ontarians other than creating another scandal.

Miss Monique Taylor: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: I believe that we have unanimous consent that the House observe a minute of silence in condolence of the tragic death of a young three-year-old child, Elijah, who wandered from safety early this morning and unfortunately was found frozen, with no vital signs, in today's bitter cold.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member seeks unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence. Agreed? Agreed.

I would ask everyone to stand.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Further debate?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to rise before this House and speak to this bill. I really do appreciate the comments that we've heard in the House today, in particular from the member from Welland, in support of a very important initiative.

Ontario is taking a very important step in helping millions of people to save for their retirement by introducing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2014. I know this is a top priority of our government, and also a top priority for the people of Ontario.

The pension plan was at the centre of our election platform, and I know that in going door to door during the election, this was something that my community in Cambridge were really pleased to see our government take leadership on. Seniors, although aware that they wouldn't be benefiting from this particular plan, worry for their children and their grandchildren's retirement, and they were very happy to see it come in so that they knew in the future that their families would be looked after.

We've heard from the minister that in her conversations with people across the province, people are telling her that they're concerned about outliving their savings, and I certainly heard that in my work with my seniors as a care coordinator with the CCAC in the last few months before I was elected.

Fortunately, I was able to attend a meeting with the minister in my riding of Cambridge in December, where we had a variety of perspectives there at the table: small business, larger companies, labour activists—associations representing a wide variety of sectors. One participant in particular that I remember represented retired workers. Her first comment was, "I wish this bill had been passed yesterday. We really need this in Ontario, and I really see it benefiting seniors in the future." What I

took away from this meeting was that the status quo is no longer an option.

The minister and my colleagues have shared several statistics that demonstrate that people are not saving enough for retirement. Study after study shows that people are just not saving, for whatever reason. As was mentioned, in this week alone, both RBC and Sun Life Financial released polls showing that people are not saving enough and are worried about outliving their savings.

It's important to remind this House of the staggering numbers. According to an RBC poll, only 39% of respondents put money away for retirement during 2014. It also reported that 30% of respondents have not started saving at all, no matter how old they are. Sun Life Financial found that six out of 10 Canadians expect to be continuing to work after age 65, and for many, this wasn't a choice. They felt that they didn't have enough, or knew they didn't have enough, money to retire on. A friend of mine only half-jokingly often quips, "I'm working on Freedom 85."

I go back to the member from Welland's comments about health workers. Certainly during the 1990s, when there was a large layoff of nurses and health care workers, many of those either went on to different careers or had to switch what they were doing midstream. And many were out of a pension plan that they were able to participate in, because many of the health care workers in the 1990s and on into the early 2000s were part-time status and weren't able to participate in their workplace pension plan. As a health care worker myself, I see this over and over again, and it's not just nurses. It's many of the other health care workers on a part-time status.

I'm proud of this government, because not only have we hired 28,000 more nurses in the province of Ontario since 2003, but many of those jobs have switched to full-time rather than part-time status, and there are some workplaces that allow even part-time workers to participate in their workplace pension plan.

Mr. Speaker, these numbers are staggering, and they point to a major problem on the horizon, a problem that will only get worse in the face of inaction. Without action, we can expect to see Ontarians facing declining standards of living in retirement. This also threatens to slow our economic growth and consumption, because as we know, if people are forced to stretch their savings, they won't be out supporting the local economy. That's not something our government is willing to let happen. We know that Ontarians expect their government to take leadership to help secure their retirement, and that's precisely why I'm proud to be part of a government in which our leader said there is no discussion; we are moving forward in presenting the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

Recent polling suggests that 77% of Ontarians support an increase in pension benefits. Speaker, that is why our government is taking that action and the associate minister is working so tirelessly to build a made-in-Ontario pension plan. It's why this legislation is so critical,

because we need to look after our people. We need to make sure that nobody is left behind, and we need to make sure that seniors are going to be looked after in their retirement years after working so hard.

This legislation would help create a savings tool for the people of this province, designed to give more people a secure floor they can rely on. With the amount that is in the press, the coffee shop chat and folks I have seen in my constituency office and around my community, people are certainly worried about this, and it is certainly top of mind.

The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will provide a predictable stream of income paid for life. That's significant, because many are worried and often half-jokingly suggest that because their retirement savings plan is going to run out soon they want to not outlive that particular time. It's certainly a concern of our parents and our grandparents, and we don't want that for the future.

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This is an investment in our collective futures and a chance to give Ontarians the retirement security they deserve. Higher incomes amongst retirees mean more stable consumption in the future and decreased reliance on publicly funded social services. Several folks in discussions that I've had about whether they agreed or didn't agree with this particular plan have recognized that if we don't do something those pensioners who are not getting enough to live on are going to be a drain on our social services in the future because we do need to look after them. In turn, improved job and economic growth in the long term will be the result. When people feel more stable, they're able to retire in comfort. When we've got people who can go out and contribute to the local economy, that is good for our businesses.

As we move forward, our government has taken several steps to help our businesses plan for it. The minister has held several meetings with business representatives and associations to ensure that they're aware of the plan. We are providing over two years of lead time to allow businesses the time to adjust.

We are enrolling employers in stages beginning with the largest employers, so they do have lead time to make the changes necessary. We're also phasing in contributions over two years. This, again, assists our businesses in planning for the future.

The introduction will also coincide with expected reductions in employment insurance premiums, and certainly the businesses in Cambridge are hearing this message and will make the adjustments.

Speaker, I think that all members of the House can agree that retirement security is a key priority, something we should all be striving for not only for the parents that we're all looking after, but for our children and our grandchildren into the future. We believe that after a lifetime of contributing to our economy, working hard for those long hours to provide for our families and for our communities, Ontarians really do deserve the peace of mind of having a secure retirement. That's why we are asking members on all sides of the House to support Bill 56.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I am pleased to rise to speak on the member from Cambridge's comments. We are certainly in disagreement about the proposed retirement pension plan that the government is bringing forward.

I know she was a nurse also, as am I and as is—

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: There are four of us.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, four of us in the Legislature.

I did pick up on one of her comments that you are hiring more nurses but I think, if you went to both ONA and RNAO sites, you're actually laying off nurses—just to clarify that one point.

I've certainly heard loud and clear—I know the member from Peterborough said that the people at the tire shop or the coffee shop were all in favour of the pension plan. I'm just across the border in Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock and, boy, I can't really find anybody who is saying, "Yay, we want this pension plan"—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, I talk to everybody there.

All my chambers of commerce are very upset about this, vocally, getting their businesses to give the government hard proof, information replying to your pension plan consultation—so it's from them. I can see that some don't believe me over there on the government benches about what I'm hearing from my constituents.

It's going to cost jobs. The people who are lucky enough to actually have a job in my area right now are scared that they're going to lose that job because there is the tax on the employer of 1.9%. The employee—God love them—if they could put away money, are too busy paying their hydro bill. They're going to have another 2% knocked off their paycheque. Lots of those people can't afford it, and those who can afford it do have vehicles: registered retirement savings plans, tax-free savings accounts. There are vehicles. And when they do pass on, that actually goes to their loved ones in their will, whereas if they have to contribute to this plan by the government, where does that money they've actually saved go? It goes into those government coffers, which, I can argue, is very misspent at this point in time.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: First, my comments about the member from Cambridge's speech. There's no question that we have a pension crisis in Ontario. I don't believe that this bill will be adequate to solve that crisis, but I think the idea of a defined benefit pension plan that can complement the Canada Pension Plan makes sense. I think it's critical. I think our critic, Jennifer French from Oshawa, has said previously that whatever is designed, whatever comes forward, has to be compatible with CPP so that hopefully in the future, when the CPP is enlarged, there's the opportunity for Ontario to integrate its plan with the federal plan. That is the direction to go in.

The member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock: I disagree with you. I would say that your arguments are such that they could be used to oppose national

health care. They could be used to oppose the current Canada Pension Plan. They don't advance the needs of people in this province. I understand the reason you make the arguments—and you and I have been in the Legislature for a while; I have a lot of respect for the way you approach things—but I disagree with your analysis.

Back to the member from Cambridge: It's my hope that your government will have the resolve to hold on to the idea of a defined benefit pension plan, not a defined contribution plan, not to follow the Harper course of action, because frankly, that course of action means impoverishment for seniors for decades to come. If we're actually going to have pension plans that work for the vast majority of the population, we have to pool our resources. We have to put our money together. We have to get the best returns on our investments. That has been a critical part of what has succeeded in Canada for decades. It's my hope that the government won't yield to the pressure from the financial ministry to back off a defined benefit pension plan.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that you want me to remind people who are watching today that members of provincial Parliament do not have a defined benefit pension plan. Most people think that members of provincial Legislature have the same pension plan as the federal members of Parliament; they do not have it. The younger members, particularly, of the Legislature would want this kind of pension plan that is being brought forward by the government. They could participate like everybody else because they don't have a defined benefit pension plan, and we know the challenges that there are for people who don't have a defined benefit pension plan. I know that members wanted me to share that with others.

I enjoyed the speech by the member. I heard her name bandied about in the Legislature today. I want to say that I fully believe that the party had the right to do what they did in that particular case: to let John Tory run in her riding and to hire her for a job after that. There's nothing wrong with that. I really like Laurie Scott. She's a good member. But I heard people talking about that. I just want to make sure: I think that's fine, what they did in that case. It's similar, I guess, to what people are talking about in Sudbury, but I agree with that.

I was glad to hear that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry; I have to interrupt this. The comments are supposed to relate back to the member for Cambridge, who actually gave the presentation. Questions and comments should relate back to the actual presentation.

Hon. James J. Bradley: That's right, and I thank the member for Cambridge for her very good speech.

She was replied to as well by the member for Toronto–Danforth. I was saying to him earlier today that I can remember when the NDP used to talk about policies and principles, and I really think that's good. I'm glad to hear them participating in this debate today instead of

scandal-mongering, as they have been for the last while. I was really pleased, because I thought his response to the member from Cambridge was quite an astute response on this important issue.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I appreciate the opportunity to respond in the two minutes that we have.

I think the important thing for people to understand is that this pension discussion is based on, at its fundamental base, that you as an employee have an obligation to contribute 1.9% of your income into a defined contribution pension plan, and the employer has 1.9%. As people have looked at that and recognized what kind of money that represents, there has been quite a reaction, quite a pushback, particularly from people who would be affected. By that, I mean those who don't have the defined benefit pension that a public sector and major companies and people like that have.

The people who are actually going to feel this 1.9% come out of their pockets have suddenly realized that this is what the government is talking about. So, looking at that and the kind of balancing they have to do, employers have to really cover almost 4%, because the employee is having a paycheque deduction and he's having a payroll cut as well. As people begin to understand this, they are very concerned about their ability just to pay the bills now. It's also something we should remember, that not only is this government planning on this kind of cost to small business, but we know from the Minister of Climate Change that just around the corner, presto, another tax.

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

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really do appreciate the comments from Toronto–Danforth, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and the member from Simcoe—sorry. Anyway, thank you very much for the comments.

I think what we're hearing around the House and around the province is this collective concern about our retirement savings. I would like to point out that the member from St. Catharines is certainly accurate: that we've talked about pensions in the House and yet we, as MPPs, do not have pensions. I'd like to correct the record for those at home as well who have suggested that because we have pensions, we shouldn't be dealing with them. But we don't.

But in saying that, I think that all of us here in the House today are being called by our communities to do something. We want to make sure that our families, our parents, our children and our grandchildren are looked after into retirement. Many, many workplaces do not have a pension plan that workers can contribute to, so having one that is essential for workers will make sure they are looked after into the future.

I certainly have talked about my young sons at home. They're getting the message at home that with their very

first paycheques, they should be putting 10% aside, and they've started to do that now. But they are also recognizing that they want to make sure that their own retirements are secure. I certainly hear from many constituents in my riding regarding this.

I'm very proud to be part of a government that's bringing forward the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, a made-in-Ontario pension plan, that will ensure the security of folks who are retiring after hard work into the future.

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

Mr. Ted Arnott: I appreciate very much this opportunity to speak in this House this afternoon on second reading of Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, standing in the name of the Associate Minister of Finance, who has been given responsibility for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. I want to acknowledge that the minister is present in the House this afternoon, and those of us who are serving in the opposition appreciate the fact that the minister is here to listen to our comments and hear the concerns of our constituents.

I'm privileged to be here on behalf of the people of Wellington–Halton Hills and have very much appreciated their trust over the years and the opportunity to be here.

I think people tuning into the debate this afternoon would be puzzled to hear us talking about pensions when they have read in the newspaper in recent days about the various scandals of the government, the three police investigations that are ongoing: one with respect to the Ornge air ambulance debacle, another with respect to the gas plants cancellations and the deletion of emails that may have been illegal and, third, most recently, the Sudbury by-election and what happened in advance of that. The police investigations are ongoing. Those, I think, are amongst the biggest concerns of the people of Ontario.

Hon. David Zimmer: What does that have to do with pensions?

Mr. Ted Arnott: Actually, it has a lot to do with pensions, because these are the key issues and concerns of the people of Ontario right now with respect to what's going on in this place, and yet here we are, discussing Bill 56.

It is the government's prerogative to call the bill that's going to be debated this afternoon. The government House leader has called this for debate, but I have to put those concerns on the record. Obviously, we have serious concerns on this side of the House about those three police investigations that are ongoing.

I also need to point out the fiscal context in which this bill is being debated this afternoon, because we are leading up to a provincial budget. I had the opportunity to serve on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs for a week with the member for Nipissing and a number of other members from the government side. We listened to public hearings.

Again, I think it's important to point out the fiscal context in which we debate legislation this afternoon. We

know that the projected deficit for the province of Ontario this year, the current fiscal year which ends at the end of March, is \$12.5 billion. At the same time, the government promises to balance the budget by 2017-18, before the next election. The deficit has actually gone up from \$10.5 billion last year to \$12.5 billion this year. When the deficit is going up, people are puzzled as to how the government would claim to be balancing the budget or making progress towards balancing the budget.

The projected provincial net debt is \$287.3 billion, and the government would congratulate itself that its net debt is somewhat less than the debt in Greece, but the fact is we're getting close to running out of fiscal room on that. In 2003, the debt was \$139 billion; now it's \$287.3 billion.

Interjections.

Mr. Ted Arnott: These are the government's numbers, and it's eliciting a bit of a response from the government side. But I take these numbers from the fiscal outlook, the fall economic statement, that the government presented in the House before Christmas.

We see this year that provincial government spending is \$130.2 billion, up from \$126.4 billion last year. Again, the government says they're working towards a balanced budget, and they would lead us to believe they're making progress towards a balanced budget, but in fact, spending year over year continues to go up and up and up.

The net per capita debt, in effect the amount that each Ontarian owes because of years of overspending by provincial governments going back to Confederation, the amount that every man, woman or child in Ontario would owe if the debt were to be paid back, is \$21,003 this year, up from \$11,339 in 2003—almost an increase of 100% since this Liberal government took office.

Interest payments on the debt this year are expected to be \$10.8 billion. This is the third-largest line item in the budget and the fastest-growing line item in the budget. By 2017-18, it is expected that \$13.9 billion will be what the government will have to spend to service the debt.

All of these concerns need to be put on the record. The people need to understand the fiscal position of this government. I'm afraid that this particular government would like people not to understand the severity of the debt problem and the financial problem that we face in the province of Ontario. They would like to downplay it. I think it's incumbent upon the opposition to continue to remind the people about the situation that we're in and what's going to have to be done to alleviate the challenge that we face.

With respect to Bill 56, I have reviewed the presentation that was made in the House by the minister leading off the debate on second reading. I must say, it was an interesting speech. I would have to say, though, that she understated the concern that exists amongst the business community articulated by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and their many individual members who are very, very concerned about this and what it means.

When I talk to individual small business people in my riding, many of them tell me that they have already put off plans to hire more people because they know this is coming. They know that it's going to be a deduction off their bottom line, irrespective of whether or not they're making a profit, and that's a serious concern. They're just struggling to survive over the next few months and years, let alone looking at this big new increase in costs that will actually lead them to hire fewer people or to try to find ways to reduce their payroll costs.

1710

We're in the context of an unemployment situation in the province of Ontario that's around 7%, and it has been at an unacceptably high level going back to 2008, when the recession hit. We now have had, I think, almost six years where our unemployment rate has been higher than the national average in the country. This should concern all of us—I would think that it should concern the government in particular, but all of us in the province of Ontario—about how we're going to ensure that we get back to a level of employment that is acceptable; that there are job opportunities, particularly for our young people; and that the opportunities exist across the province, not just in a few communities or in a few sectors of the economy. I don't think the government seems to fully appreciate that fact, based on the policy agenda that it's pursuing.

I've received many emails from constituents, most of whom either own or are involved in small business. They ask me about the Ontario pension plan, and what my position is. What I tell them is, I agree with them that the province is going in the wrong direction under the Liberals, and I share their concerns about the Ontario pension plan.

I understand and would acknowledge that there are a great many people in the province of Ontario who are concerned about whether or not they're going to have enough set aside to provide for their retirement—there's no question about that—especially people who are in their fifties and sixties, who are close to retirement age. If they haven't made retirement savings plan contributions over the years, and they look at their statements, perhaps they are concerned, wondering whether or not they're going to have enough money to retire. I understand that, and I realize that that concern exists.

But the question is, are those people going to benefit under Bill 56, if it's passed, and if the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is actually brought into effect? We know, even from what the government is saying, to achieve the full benefit of the plan, people are going to have to make contributions and work for something like 40 years to receive something like \$12,000 a year by way of a benefit under the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. People who are in their late fifties or early sixties, wondering if they have enough to retire, hear that the provincial government is bringing in a retirement pension plan; of course they think that might be good news. But the fact is, those people who are most anxious about retirement right now, because they're close to it and perhaps haven't

saved enough for the lifestyle that they would hope to have, are not going to benefit. The government knows that, and yet they continue to try to exploit the fears of some of these unfortunate people and try to generate political support based on their anxiety and their concern. Mr. Speaker, I think that is regrettable.

I also would add that this retirement pension plan will reduce take-home pay for workers. In many cases, we've seen some credible economists like Jack Mintz say that people who theoretically would want to receive a benefit from a pension plan like this are not going to be helped; lower-income workers are going to get shafted in this arrangement. They're not going to get a retirement benefit that they would hope to get. In some cases, because an additional retirement pension plan benefit might be forthcoming to them from the province of Ontario, it would reduce their guaranteed income supplement, and they may not be net winners in the process.

In the short term, of course, it reduces take-home pay for workers by 1.9%, as soon as it comes into effect. The fact is, a vast majority of people who are working today in low- and medium-income jobs are struggling to make ends meet as it is. They're living paycheque to paycheque, and to reduce their take-home income at this time, they are going to feel it, and it is going to be causing immediate short-term hardship for them. There's no question about that.

We believe that bringing this in at this time will cost jobs. I've already talked about that briefly. We hear that from the business owners and the business organizations like the CFIB and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and other business groups. We heard that from the hotel and motel association—a very passionate presentation at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs about the negative impact that this is going to have for their industry. I would commend them, and recommend to each member of the House that they should read the presentation that was made at the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs by the hotel and motel association discussing this particular issue.

We believe that this bill would create a duplicated bureaucracy. There already is the Canada Pension Plan, as we know, but to create a provincial bureaucracy to administer pension funds is probably complete, absolute duplication, and we would question that part of this bill in this approach.

A better solution, I would suggest, would be to enhance the CPP when it is affordable to do so. We used to hear from this particular Liberal government that they hoped that the Liberals would be elected in the House of Commons in the next federal election, that they would look to the Liberal Party federally to enhance the CPP. If that's still their position, why are they bringing forward enabling legislation at this time in advance of the election? I haven't really had clarification on that. But I think that when the time comes, when the economy is in a stronger financial position and over time because of inflation, it would be reasonable to look at the amounts

with respect to CPP. But at the same time, now is not the time to enhance the CPP, and I think that the federal government is right to say no at this time until the economy is stronger and the economy is on a more stable financial basis.

I think we also need to do more to encourage the awareness of voluntary pooled registered pension plans. My colleague the member for York-Simcoe has talked about that for years in this place, and she has promoted that idea for a long, long time. I know the government has finally taken tentative steps to introduce legislation in that regard. But at the same time, that is another option that people need to know about. I have written numerous letters to the minister, to the Premier on this issue and emails in response to constituents' concerns, and I will continue to do so.

Bill 56, we know, is intended to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. If Bill 56 is passed, the government would be required to establish this plan no later than January 1, 2017, not yet two years away, coincidentally just before a provincial election is expected in 2018. "The Minister of Finance or another member of the executive council must introduce legislation that provides for the operation of the plan, the administration and investment management of the plan through an administrative entity, and the basic requirements of the plan, including those set out in the schedule to the act." Of course, this is preliminary legislation—enabling legislation it has been said—to provide for the establishment of the plan. But there would have to be more legislation to come if indeed this bill passes and if indeed the government decides to proceed in the end.

There is a provision for the creation of an administrative entity, it's called. The administrative entity "must be established for the purpose of administering the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan," and the "duties are specified in subsection 2(2) of the act."

The collection of information is an important provision of this legislation. "The Minister of Finance is authorized to request and collect specified information, including personal information, from employers, public bodies and the federal government for the purpose of establishing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan" because, as it stands now, the government doesn't have the power to get this private information from employers or from individuals and it would seek to acquire that power through the passage of Bill 56.

The basic requirements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan: The schedule sets out the basic requirements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, including "contributions to the plan, eligibility of employees and employers under the plan, payment of retirement benefits and survivor benefits, and compliance and enforcement."

The biggest concern that I think many of us have in this House—aside from the timing of this legislation, the economic cost to employers and employees at this time and the fact that the vast majority of the people who are most concerned and most anxious about their retirement in the province today, who will not actually benefit at all

from this legislation, and some of them will hardly benefit—is, what is going to be done with the money?

My colleague the member for York-Simcoe was very helpful in terms of the discussion on this bill in the conclusion of her first opportunity to speak to this bill this week. She quoted from the provincial budget of 2014, and I think it's important that this is repeated. This is in the budget from 2014: "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."

With this statement in the budget, we now understand, I think, how the money is going to be spent. The government says it's going to be an arm's-length administrative entity that's going to invest this money, but it doesn't say in Bill 56 that the investments will be put to projects for the highest possible benefit for the pensioners.

1720

Canada Pension Plan legislation, as far as I understand it, requires the managers of the pension plan to seek the highest possible return. That's not what Bill 56 says, and I think it's pretty clear from this statement in budget 2014 that the government plans to take this money and spend it on their infrastructure priorities. That may be good for the projects and the communities where the money is invested. In some cases there obviously may be some projects that would be expedited under this proposal, but to suggest that the pensioners' money is being put into an account that's going to be there for future pensioners, is going to be set aside, is going to be invested perhaps in the stock market or bonds or various investments, like the Canada Pension Plan is, and to suggest and imply that that money is going to be invested for the future, for the benefit of the pensioners—actually, that money, apparently, is going to be spent on infrastructure projects.

That gives me a segue, I think, to talk about some of the infrastructure needs in my riding.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Highway 6.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The Chair of Cabinet knows of the need for the Morriston bypass, Highway 6 south of Guelph. I have talked about this in the House many, many times and even this morning I had an opportunity once again to remind the Minister of Transportation of the importance of this project and getting it on the five-year plan of the ministry for new construction, the southern highways plan.

This is an important priority that has been identified by the township of Puslinch council, the county of Wellington and a significant and growing industry group involving companies and partners like Con Cast Pipe, Sleeman, Guelph Chamber of Commerce, Canada Bread, the Private Motor Truck Council of Canada, Nestlé Waters, Tim Hortons, Maple Leaf, the Freight Manage-

ment Association of Canada, Fluke Transportation, the Grain Farmers of Ontario, the Hamilton Port Authority, the city of Hamilton, the Hamilton International Airport, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce, Cargill, as I said, the county of Wellington, the Ontario Trucking Association, the Southern Ontario Gateway Council, as I said earlier, the township of Puslinch, and the city of Guelph. All of these partners have come together to form the Morriston Bypass Coalition to urge the government to get this project on the five-year plan.

I have asked the minister repeatedly, and I gather there's some consensus in the House that may be now emerging. Some of the government ministers appear to understand the importance of the project. I would urge the minister to do the right thing and put this project on the five-year plan of the ministry and build the Morriston bypass.

We talked many times and will again next week, because the ROMA-Good Roads conference is under way, of the damage that the arbitrary cancellation of the Connecting Link Program has caused. I know the Minister of Agriculture and Food knows about this too. The cancellation of the Connecting Link Program has been absolutely devastating for a significant number of municipalities in ridings across the province. And I use a couple of examples: The township of Centre Wellington had planned to build the St. David Street bridge, Highway 6 through Fergus. It formerly would have been expected to be a Connecting Link project until the legs were cut out from under the municipality with the cancellation of the program. There needs to be a superstructure replacement and semi-integral abutment conversion of that bridge in downtown Fergus. The cost is anticipated at \$2.6 million—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I hope you're going to tie this into the bill.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Well, of course. The government, in its budget, Mr. Speaker, said they planned to bring in Bill 56 to create the retirement pension plan so that they could pay for these infrastructure projects. I think it's important for me to point out some of those infrastructure needs, although I am running out of time, unfortunately, and I have others.

I will continue to advocate for the infrastructure needs in my riding as long as the government is spending billions of dollars on infrastructure.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Cambridge on a point of order.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: A point of order, Speaker: I just wanted to correct my record that the member I was referring to last in my speech was the member from York-Simcoe. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): A member is always allowed to correct the record.

Questions and comments? The member for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming-Cochrane.

I would like to follow the comments from the member from Wellington-Halton Hills. I always listen very intently to his comments. I have to say that on a lot of his pension comments I disagree totally, but I appreciate the time he put in to describe his points.

The NDP were fully in favour of a public pension plan. The issue is, we don't think that the Liberals can pull this off. I'm going to be very frank about that, and I'll give an example of another great plan that was supposed to and that they claim does great things. That is the Green Energy Act.

How am I going to tie this in? I have a solar farm in my riding which was supposed to create all these jobs. Jobs are great for pensions. Right? So the company got the contract, the FIT contract. TransCanada PipeLines bought the project for \$60 million, but the people who built it didn't get paid. Now, how is that for your pension plan? And that came directly from the Green Energy Act that was supposed to create all these jobs, and jobs fix people's pensions.

Even worse, in the town next door, a little town called Latchford, a beautiful little town, they don't have access to natural gas and the government says they're working on that. These people have to heat their houses with propane or electricity. A lot of people in Latchford are getting older, so they heat with electricity. Again, they can't pay their electrical bills. They own their houses. Their electric bills are so high that if they don't have a pension, they're forced out of their houses. There's more to this plan than just saying you're going to create a pension plan. You have to manage the economy.

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

Hon. David Zimmer: I'm happy to add a few points to the discussion.

First, let me say something about the obvious need for the Ontario pension plan. Certainly in my riding, I hear from constituent after constituent, Friday after Friday, email after email, phone call after phone call. They are 100% supportive of this plan.

I know in my conversations and briefings from Associate Minister Hunter, who's the minister responsible, that in her travels and consultations across Ontario she's getting the same response from people across Ontario. They need this plan; they want this plan.

Having said that, our preference was, and always has been, to have the federal government, the federal Conservative Party, top up the CPP but, for whatever reason, they've crawled into a groundhog hole on this one and won't touch it. They are not interested in the larger welfare of the majority of Ontarians and Canadians. I welcome the support of the NDP for this initiative.

I just want to remind viewers that when you read through the legislation, there are three core elements to the plan:

(1) It requires equal contributions from employees and employers that are capped at 1.9% on employees' annual earnings up to \$90,000.

(2) Those contributions will be invested by an organization at arm's length from the government.

(3) The benefits will be indexed to inflation to provide a predictable source of retirement income for life.

A predictable source of retirement income: That's the key to the attraction among my constituents and broadly across the board in Ontario. It's that predictable income so that people can retire with dignity.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I just want to say that the member from Wellington–Halton Hills really hit the nail on the head. I think that's what we're really afraid of on this side of the House, that somehow this pool of money is going to be used by the government for infrastructure projects at low yields instead of investing in the highest yield possible, because a pension is only worth how the investment grows.

The member opposite who just spoke said that people want a guaranteed income in their retirement. Of course, they want a guaranteed income in their retirement, but people also want a guaranteed job with a guaranteed income during their time. More and more, we're hearing from business owners that this is actually going to take jobs out of the province. We're going to have higher unemployment rates, and those people who are unemployed are not going to be part of this pension.

1730

I think that as a province, we really do have to focus on the economy. We have to focus on cutting red tape, on creating more jobs, on cutting down the deficit and on cutting down the debt. Yes, as the member from Wellington–Halton Hills said, when Ontario shows that it can be the leader of the economy once again, maybe our federal counterparts will be willing to discuss a simplified pension scheme, one pension working together that is topped up by Ontario, as opposed to two separate pensions and somehow trusting this government not to raid the piggy bank in order to fund projects because they don't have the revenue stream because of the high debt cost.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you to the member from Wellington–Halton Hills for his comments, some of which I agree with and some of which I don't, but it's always good to hear three sides to the story.

I'm glad, though, that you raised the issue of the clawbacks, the issue of the guaranteed income supplement and of GAINS clawed back. A lot of people don't know that there could be a clawback of 50 cents on every dollar of GIS under the current rules. I frankly don't know about GAINS; if it's a 100% clawback or something less. This is the very lowest incomes in this province that get guaranteed income federally and provincially. Really, there's no point in people actually investing 1.9% of their income if, at the end of the day, they're going to have it clawed back. It reminds me of the ODSP scheme where we gave ODSP recipients a 1% increase and a promise of

no clawback on their first \$200 of income, but then we brought forth a policy that is actually going to take away \$100 a month of employment income from those people on ODSP who want to go to work. It's kind of like give it to me in this hand and claw it back in this hand.

The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane made a good point about government boondoggles, and we certainly don't want this one to turn into another one of those boondoggles that the Liberal government so frequently makes.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Wellington–Halton Hills, you have two minutes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to express appreciation to the members who responded to my comments this afternoon on this bill.

But again, I would refer to the speech from the member for York–Simcoe, who is our critic on this. She pointed out that the objectives of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board are, in fact, included in the federal legislation with respect to the CPP. It says that the requirements and the objectives of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board are:

“(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”—the best interests—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.”

Again, the enabling legislation for the CPP compels the investment board to seek the maximum possible return in the best interests of the pensioners.

Contrast that with the wording in Bill 56 under “Obligation to create administrative entity”:

“3. Investing contributions: The administrative entity shall be responsible for investing the collected contributions for the benefit of the members and other beneficiaries of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.”

The CPP requires the investment people at the CPP to seek the highest possible return. The provision in Bill 56 to establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan doesn't speak to the best interests or the highest possible return. That's why we believe the government has the intention and the plan to take that pension money and spend it on infrastructure, and will not be seeking the highest possible return in the best interests of the pensioners. That's a big issue for us. We need to hear more from the government to get this clarified. But, certainly, our caucus is very concerned about this bill, and we will be speaking against it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm grateful to have the opportunity to speak today about the proposed Ontario

Retirement Pension Plan. I hear constantly from my constituents, who are worried about what their future holds for them as they are getting older. I hear it from seniors, I hear it from those who are nearing the retirement age, but I'm also hearing it from younger workers, and that, I think, is a bit of a change from a number of years ago, when many people didn't think about their retirement income when they were young.

But that's still true for many people who are in their twenties, thirties and even early forties—pensions are not on the top of their minds. Increasingly, people are worried about whether or not they will be able to enjoy their retirement when it comes. Many, in fact, just don't believe that it will ever happen.

Yesterday morning, there was a report on the radio that a study found that more than 50% of Canadian workers expected to still be working at the age of 66. Today, we know many people who will continue to work well beyond their retirement, simply because they can't afford not to work.

In 1926, Canada's Prime Minister Mackenzie King was on shaky ground, and J.S. Woodsworth, the leader of the NDP's forerunner, the CCF, saw an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of working Canadians. Woodsworth offered King his support in return for a promise to enact a national old-age pension plan. The next year, the Old Age Pensions Act came into force, funded from general revenue. This act would ensure that seniors would not be left to live in poverty.

That was a great step forward, but it wasn't enough. In 1965, with Tommy Douglas holding the balance of power in Ottawa, the Canada Pension Plan was introduced, a plan that was self-financed through the contributions of Canadians and their employers. Today, the Canada Pension Plan is the most efficient pension plan in the country, but efficiency only gets you so far. The maximum amount you can receive from the CPP in 2015 is just over \$1,000 a month—and that's the maximum. The average for new beneficiaries is just about \$610. When you add Old Age Security and the guaranteed income supplement, many would still fall below \$20,000 a year, and that's it. Any of us in here can do the math, and we know that it's quite clear that, under those circumstances, you cannot come close to living the life you had when you were working.

Consider the expenses that they have. Rent alone, for example, could easily eat up more than half of that; or maybe even an outstanding mortgage or municipal taxes that are several hundred dollars; a telephone; and, of course, the ever-increasing cost of hydro—these are just some of the major monthly payments, but we hear more and more about seniors paying serious attention to the cost of food being controlled; the lack of a healthy diet simply means more costs on our health care system.

A recent economic impact study on US Steel was done by the city of Hamilton, and I have a few notes on that. It says:

“—Reduced retirement income is associated with heart-related death in both men and women...;

“—Seniors who are not accustomed to seeking out services may not be aware of services available to them...; and

“—Stress can lead to many mental and physical health issues, the most serious being depression, heart disease and death.”

As we move forward, we must be aware of the broader implications for our seniors, for the services we provide and for our communities as a whole. The Canada Pension Plan, as it stands, just does not cut it, but that is where this pension crisis—and that's what it is, a crisis—should be getting addressed: through enhancements to the Canada Pension Plan. In the meantime, the reality is that Canadian retirees need to supplement the income they receive from the CPP with a workplace pension or their own personal savings.

For many, many years, the federal government has chosen to promote RRSPs rather than to make improvements to the CPP. As you know, it's that time of year—tax time—when we see our financial institutions spending a fortune to encourage us to buy RRSPs, and there are still a few days left to do just that. But despite the hype from the banks and the tax incentives offered to encourage people to put their money into RRSPs, it doesn't seem to be working.

1740

Statistics Canada says only about 24% of eligible tax filers contribute to RRSPs. Although the maximum you can contribute to an RRSP is 18% of your income, the average contribution in 2013 was just over \$3,000.

Then there's the unused amount eligible to be put into an RRSP. You know the little box at the bottom line of the assessment where you file your taxes? It says “RRSP contribution limit” for next year's taxes. When you add those up for everyone in Canada, you get an incredible \$500 billion, and that was expected to double in the next three years. That's right: \$500 billion of room allowable in RRSP contributions. Certainly for many, they can't afford to put any more, but last year, two thirds of people said they wanted to contribute more and 35% said they could have contributed more.

So what about the other aspect of retirement income, workplace pensions? Well, what we're seeing is that they are becoming increasingly rare, and those that do exist are becoming more vulnerable. For starters, two thirds of Ontarians do not have a current workplace pension. Of those who do, many companies now offer defined contribution plans rather than defined benefit plans—basically an RRSP, the value of which is unpredictable, especially if the market goes the way it did a few years back.

Then there are the serious concerns about the commitment of companies to fulfill those obligations. In Hamilton, we particularly hear from thousands of people who have based their retirement plans on income they understood they would receive from their pension plans that they paid into for years, and I want to spend a little time talking about this, Speaker.

For decades, workers at Stelco negotiated contracts with their employer, and as part of those contracts, some

were to believe that it was part of their contracts and their agreements that those wages would be deferred. Rather than receiving the money then and there, some of it would be put into a defined benefit pension plan that guaranteed a certain income when they retired. They felt safe in the knowledge that those pension benefits, along with their CPP benefits, would allow them to live out their lives in a relatively comfortable retirement for which they had worked for decades and which they certainly deserved.

Now they aren't so sure. They aren't sure what the future holds, because US Steel, the American company that was allowed to buy Stelco in 2007, are reneging on their responsibilities to live up to the agreements that they had made with their workers. Here's part of what a constituent wrote to me:

"I am again writing to you with my grave concerns about my pension, benefits (medical, dental, eye care, etc.) and insurance plans. I worked for 45 years to get where I am today and don't want to see the somewhat limited security that I have obtained over those years be taken away from me and my wife. I joined the pension plan as soon as I was allowed to and certainly don't want to have it reduced through no fault of my own."

"I am fully aware that I am just a very small senior citizen in the scheme of things and that I have no control over what others with money or powers can do to our standard of living and survival by taking necessities away from us. I know that there are people out there that want us seniors to disappear."

Speaker, it's hard to read that and not hear the despair of someone who has worked all their life. Unfortunately, the writer of this email is certainly not alone.

As part of the purchase agreement in 2007, US Steel agreed to assume pension obligations for four Stelco pension plans. Under an agreement with the province, the company funds the four pension plans. There's two salaried and two union, both with Hamilton Stelco and Nanticoke, so that's where the four came in. The deal with the province expires at the end of this year. After that, minimum funding requirements resume.

In 2012, an actuarial report on the US Steel plans found that, although the plans have \$2.5 billion in assets, they would be more than \$1.6 billion short of what they need if the company were to go bankrupt. As US Steel works to find a way out of their pension obligations, that is what these workers fear: bankruptcy of US Steel Canada brought on by their bosses south of the border.

Speaker, there are 15,000 workers and retirees covered by those pension plans. The largest group is approximately 8,000 retirees who are members of Steelworkers Local 1005. But I have also heard from some of the 5,000 salaried pensioners. In one of their information updates, Local 1005 laid the blame on the US Steel pension funding agreement at the door of the provincial government. That agreement came out of the CCAA restructuring and included the Ontario superintendent of pensions and the Minister of Finance when it was first drafted and then amended.

The Local 1005 newsletter reads as this: "They were the main bodies that tried to convince the workers that this pension funding agreement was in the best interests of pension plan members. At the end of the day, it is the Ontario government's responsibility to ensure that the pension funding agreement does ensure solvency funding of Local 1005's pension plan."

Salaried retirees are equally upset. Here's what they had to say about the situation at US Steel:

"When US Steel purchased Stelco in 2007, they assumed the pension and benefit liabilities and also convinced the federal and provincial government officials that the purchase 'would be good for Canada.' It sure has not been.

"Early in 2014, US Steel began a significant cost saving program, which included looking at pensions and benefits. During the summer of 2014, US Steel made US Steel Canada a stand-alone subsidiary and, along with a change in accounting practices, US Steel became unprofitable. Then in the fall of 2014, US Steel Canada went into CCAA," which is the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act.

The salaried retirees continued: "Until 1987, the pension plan was contributory and, along with Stelco, we paid into it with every paycheque. These contributions were deferred wages and now appear to be at risk. Continued health care benefits were also guaranteed and they too appear to be at risk at a time in pensioners' lives when those benefits are most needed."

That is part of the story of US Steel, formerly Stelco, and it gives you a sense of what those workers are going through. USW Local 1005 and the salaried retirees group are working hard to get their employees what they rightfully deserve and what is theirs. But make no mistake: There can be no doubt that they are not only deeply worried about what their future holds, but are also incensed at the treatment that they are receiving. In the words of my good friend Jake Lombardo of Local 1005: "Governments and the court should hold companies accountable for pension obligations which were agreed at the bargaining table. These are what you call deferred wages. It is criminal what they are doing to the people that put in 30, 40, or 50 years of hard work. You be the judge."

We all know the workers at US Steel are not alone in their fears. We remember, for example, the fate of Nortel workers and their retirement benefits when that company went bankrupt six years ago.

Pension benefits are being cut left, right and centre, and workers all across Ontario are being left to pay the price. It can be a complex array of situations where changes to pension benefits are intermingled with RRSPs.

Here's what one constituent said in a letter he sent to former Premier Dalton McGuinty:

"I am a Stelco pensioner with over 36 years of service. I am extremely concerned regarding Stelco's bankruptcy protection and the effect it will have on my pension."

"I am holding the provincial government responsible for allowing Stelco to underfund my pension in the first

place. Secondly, the provincial government increased my RRSP pension adjustment amount based on a pension that I may not get. This increase reduced my yearly allowable RRSP contribution limit.

“As a result, every tax year my RRSP contributions were lower, my tax refunds were lower and my RRSP tax sheltered growth was lower. All this because of a pension I may not get. How do I ever make up for those losses if my pension is reduced?”

He concludes his letter with the following: “These pensions have been underfunded with the blessing of the provincial government. It is time for the provincial government to accept responsibility and act now to protect what is rightfully ours.”

Twice, the NDP has introduced private members’ bills brought forward by my colleague the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek in a bid to alleviate some of the suffering caused in these situations. The bills would have increased the monthly Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund from \$1,000 a month to \$2,500. If the government had allowed that bill to move forward and made it law, Hamilton’s US Steel employees, and workers all across Ontario, would be feeling a heck of a lot better about their retirement. But that didn’t happen.

So the crisis in pensions continues, and we, in the NDP, believe it’s time for an Ontario public pension plan. We introduced a pension proposal back in 2010. It was similar to this plan in many ways, but there were some differences.

The Liberals opposed our plan at that time, but I am pleased that they are now on board, and I hope they continue to push it through. There will undoubtedly be some opposition to this, and we have heard some of it already. Some of that opposition will be lethal.

Banks and insurance companies will see this plan as competition for their plans that they currently promote

and sell. Perhaps ironically we can expect them to use some of the millions that they make from these products to attack these proposals—there’s a fine example of your retirement dollars at work. But I urge the government to push forward.

I look forward to two other bills that will be required to put this plan in place—the deadline for that will be January 2017: One that will establish the arm’s-length administrative body to handle benefits and asset management and one that will provide the details of the specific design of that plan.

With our aging population, it is critical that we come to terms with the future that we are facing. The defined benefit feature of the plan will help Ontarians plan for the future. Although the pensions received through the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will be modest, knowing exactly what they can expect to receive well in advance will help Ontarians to plan accordingly. It is predicted that a worker with 40 years in the plan earning \$45,000 a year will make an annual contribution of \$788 for a maximum annual payout of \$6,410. If you’re earning \$70,000, the contribution would be \$1,263 for a payout of \$9,970.

This plan will certainly help with the serious pension challenges we are facing, but more needs to be done. I urge the government to push for a federal government that is committed to enhancing the Canada Pension Plan and to work with our federal NDP leader and the next Prime Minister of Canada, Tom Mulcair, to promote the plan that he is proposing to do just that. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1754.

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Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiques, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville Welland Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud Oshawa Niagara Falls Nickel Belt	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP) Fraser, John (LIB) French, Jennifer K. (NDP) Gates, Wayne (NDP) Gélinas, France (NDP)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest Oxford Kitchener–Conestoga Windsor–Tecumseh Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington Barrie	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) Hardeman, Ernie (PC) Harris, Michael (PC) Hatfield, Percy (NDP) Hillier, Randy (PC)	St. Paul's	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB) Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	
Jones, Sylvia (PC) Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Dufferin–Caledon Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB) Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Malhi, Harinder (LIB) Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills Nepean–Carleton Brampton–Springdale Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud Algoma–Manitoulin Davenport Thornhill	
Mantha, Michael (NDP) Martins, Cristina (LIB) Martow, Gila (PC)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry Cambridge Burlington	
McDonell, Jim (PC) McGarry, Kathryn (LIB) McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
McNaughton, Monte (PC)		
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)		

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

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

Chair / Présidente: Soo Wong
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 Przedziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: John Fraser
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Cristina Martins
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Wayne Gates, Marie-France Lalonde
Harinder Malhi, Cristina Martins
Jim McDonell, Randy Pettapiece
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przedziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
Jack McLaren, Michael Mantha
Cristina Martins, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qaadri
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Toby Barrett
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Granville Anderson, Bas Balkissoon
Chris Ballard, Toby Barrett
Garfield Dunlop, Eleanor McMahon
Laurie Scott, Jagmeet Singh
Soo Wong
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
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