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Wednesday 25 February 2015

Mercredi 25 février 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 25 February 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 25 février 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AGRICULTURE INSURANCE ACT
(AMENDING THE CROP INSURANCE
ACT, 1996), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ASSURANCE
AGRICOLE (MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 1996
SUR L'ASSURANCE-RÉCOLTE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 24, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is, of course, an honour as always to rise in the House to join the debate on a really important issue that we're talking about this morning. G40 is the Agriculture Insurance Act, second reading, that amends the Crop Insurance Act.

Speaker, as many members know, I come from the riding of Essex, which is one of the pre-eminent hotbeds for agricultural production in Ontario. We're very, very proud of our history in Essex county, and many would know the incredible variety of agricultural products that come out of the county. Of course, we would all know Leamington and Kingsville, home of the largest amount of vegetables grown under glass in our greenhouse industry. We're very proud; it's a very important economic generator for our region, one that continues to innovate and continues to grow—no pun intended. They certainly are a large portion of our regional economy and provide a tangible economic benefit to our area.

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: If only they had access to more hydro power. I'll get into that, for my friend from Windsor-Tecumseh, who also knows the importance of agricultural production.

Today we're talking about expanding this act. G40 expands the Crop Insurance Act to cover other products. Currently, the Crop Insurance Act covers about 90 products in the province, including grains, oilseeds, fruits,

vegetables, forage—hay—honey and tobacco, but it does not cover livestock or maple products. That's what we're talking about today: expanding that coverage to those segments of agriculture, which are, of course, important.

We know that we have a good base of livestock production and a footprint in the province, and it's growing as well. As the recognition of locally grown food and the need and demand for locally grown food increases, these types of industries are going to also increase.

That isn't to say that they aren't facing, and won't face, tremendous challenges, as we've seen in other jurisdictions. I would point to Alberta, which several years ago faced a massive BSE crisis that really decimated their industry. We need to be cognizant of that, and I think this is what this bill does. It is an enabling piece of legislation that allows the government to ultimately bring those types of products into the fold under the Agriculture Insurance Act, and provide those producers with some coverage—some support and protection—should things go awry.

We know there are challenges, not only through the BSE-type viruses or illnesses, but also, of course, environmental challenges that farmers face each and every day and each and every season that are outside of their control. That's why these types of mechanisms are incredibly important. I would say they are vitally important, not only to our economy but, even more importantly, to our national security. That is how absolutely important this industry is. We're talking about food security. We're talking about food sovereignty and the ability to rely on your own production, domestic production; and food safety, to be able to ensure that the products we all eat each and every day are safe and produced with a good amount of oversight, protection and safety.

We know that farmers do that. We know that they put the highest standards on every one of the products that leaves the farm gate. However, we have to remain diligent in terms of ensuring that those regulations are not so burdensome that it puts them out of business, but also balances the need and the demand for food awareness, food safety and, really, origin: Where is it coming from?

I would suspect, and I would argue, that if you canvass the majority of Canadians and certainly Ontarians, we're more likely, more apt, to choose a product that is grown and made here in Ontario rather than one that is made somewhere else in the world, because we know our farmers—they're our friends; they're our neighbours—and we know the value they place on their products and their industry.

I'm sure that members of the House have heard the phrase, "If you ate today, thank a farmer." And of course,

if you are a farmer, thank you, because we know that farmers feed cities; farmers feed communities. They are not simply that; they provide a vital component to our rural identity, something that has increasingly been diminished under this Liberal government, frankly.

I live in rural Ontario. I drive the county roads. When I look down the concessions and see a large acreage, a large farm that's been owned from generation to generation, and I know the challenges those farmers are facing and I know they are potentially deciding to maybe sell the farm and I also know that their children aren't likely to take it up because of those challenges, because of the burdens that have been placed on farmers, that puts our industry in peril and puts our food security in peril—back to the nature of food sovereignty and our ability to produce our own food.

Imagine if we lost the ability, not only to produce our own food but to control it, and the knowledge that it takes to produce food. It's incredible. Farmers are no longer simply planting seed and waiting for something to pop out of the ground. If you're a farmer, you are an environmentalist, because you have to be a steward of your land; you have to recognize the challenges in keeping up your land. You are an engineer, because you've got to fix tractors—you're a mechanic. You're an economist, because you've got to watch the markets. You are a whole host of professions and knowledge that it takes to be a farmer. Imagine what type of position we would be in, as a country and certainly as a province, if we lost that knowledge base. That's why I would submit that agricultural production in the province is our number one important industry, not only because of the economic value, but because of that security value.

There's so much more we could be doing, so much more that we have to do, so much more that farmers and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers Union have told us we could be doing, one of which is developing a provincial agriculture strategy, not simply an ad hoc way or an ad hoc approach to how we deal with agriculture. It's a piecemeal approach. When things go bad, we try to find some money here and try to develop a program here to be able to buffer that production. It can't work. It's not sustainable, and it doesn't give the confidence to the industry that we take agriculture seriously.

Imagine if we had, in this province, an actual provincial agriculture strategy, something that would address the rising cost of hydro, the skyrocketing cost of hydro that many of our producers face. Imagine if we addressed that issue for them, so that they could feel confident in going forward and growing forward.

0910

Imagine if we reviewed the barriers to trade, being access to market but also the imbalance that we face under some of our trading agreements that allow foreign food to be dumped into Ontario, into Canada. Imagine if we said, "Whoa, we're not going to do that any longer. We're going to create a level playing field for our agricultural producers," because we know their costs for in-

puts are incredibly higher than some other regions of the planet. Imagine if we actually took agricultural production seriously.

Investing in access to natural gas: There is a consensus throughout the agriculture industry in Ontario that they need more access to natural gas and the ability to use it, given that it is certainly more affordable these days than hydro.

Speaker, Rural Ontario revolves around agricultural production and all of the effects of this government when it comes to rural Ontario. I'm talking about the closure of rural and small schools, the closure of rural hospitals; I would point to the OB unit being threatened to be closed at Leamington general hospital. Those affect the decision-making process of our farmers, whether they continue to produce in those regions or whether they close up shop completely and maybe sell their land and their business to a foreign entity. Again, that points back to a risk of our national sovereignty in that we lose that domestic production.

Imagine if we had a provincial agriculture program that actually had procurement policy built into it, that said, "We are the government of Ontario. We have the largest buying capacity in the province." Should we not identify locally provincially grown and produced food and use it in our provincial entities—schools, hospitals, prisons? Imagine we had a threshold, let's say, of 20% where we mandated that we bought Ontario-grown food. We all hear the catchphrases; we all hear "Good things grown in Ontario." But that's really simply all it is: a really nice commercial. We're not speaking those words. We are not working towards actually supporting and enhancing and protecting agricultural production.

This, again, is enabling legislation. It calls for the government to be able to bring other products—livestock products and maple syrup, I would imagine—into the fold under the provisions of the Crop Insurance Act. It actually changes the name of the Crop Insurance Act to the Agricultural Products Insurance Act—a subtle change. I guess it's a little bit more broad in its scope, and I think that's a good thing. It definitely recognizes the importance of all of our products that are made in Ontario related to agriculture.

However, it does not tie any dollar figure to the insurance. Currently, I think it's roughly \$100 million that is within the envelope of the Crop Insurance Act. So let's say, Speaker, that grains and oilseeds have a terrible year across the province, your soy and your canola and your corn. Imagine that they have a terrible drought year, let's say due to the effects of climate change, because that is a reality that farmers know all too well, that the drastic change in weather and the uncertainty and volatility of weather is affecting their crop production and their yields. Let's say that happens, as it did in 2006, as it did in 2005, and farmers are not able to buffer that. Just those two entities alone, the grains and oilseeds commodities sector, would eat up the \$100 million. So bring in other products that may be facing the same challenges and your bank is empty. At a time when we know that OMAFRA's

budget is being cut by, I believe, 6% every year—I guess this was a mandate under the former Minister of Agriculture, who also happened to be at the time the Premier of the province. She challenged farmers to create 120,000 new jobs and double the sector's growth rate by 2020, at the same time cutting OMAFRA's budget by 6%.

I don't know who the economist is who is giving the government that type of advice, but it doesn't make sense to us here in the NDP. We would say that if you're going to challenge an industry to grow and to innovate, as they do currently, then you've got to be there in terms of support. You should actually make a commitment and you should identify the value in protecting agriculture. They haven't done that. That's a terrible signal. "We want you to grow, but we're going to cut back. We're going to cut back on local offices in areas like Essex," where we had historically, for decades and decades, a wonderful OMAFRA office that serviced local farmers. That doesn't exist anymore. Farmers have to access their support through OMAFRA from who knows where, but definitely outside of Essex county. That goes against how rural Ontario operates, Speaker.

Obviously, the government doesn't really understand rural Ontario. We like to talk to people, we like to sit down and understand and work out the nuances, and it's hard to do that over the Internet in a form letter or a form application. We need to know—there are, again, specific nuances and idiosyncrasies of each and every farm that don't simply apply. They aren't recognizing that in their slashing of the OMAFRA budget, but yet they're challenging farmers to grow more—and they will.

Farmers have always been innovative. They do so each and every day. As I said, they're not only farmers but they are engineers. They're data collectors, they are on the cutting edge of science; they understand GPS, they understand best practices and they implement them into their operations. However, they're not being led, of course, by this government. They're taking it on their own initiative to improve their product, improve their quality and safety, and I know that they will continue to do that and play a vital part.

It's a given that New Democrats support this provision to bring in livestock under the fold of the Crop Insurance Act, to ensure that should they face any challenges, we protect that industry; protect the nature and the important history of the industry. However, there is so much more that can be done in the realm of agriculture.

Imagine, Speaker—it's a government that touts the importance of rural Ontario. They say a lot of great things, but to really show some initiative, I would throw that challenge right back at the Premier, right back at the Minister of Rural Affairs: Create a standing committee on agriculture. If you actually think that farming and agricultural production in this province is as important, as I do, as we do as New Democrats, create a standing committee so that we can discuss all of these issues that I brought up today so that we can continue—we can show our agricultural producers out there that we actually care, we take them seriously and we're going to have a specif-

ic forum for them to voice their concerns, for them to play a role in discussing legislative initiatives. Why not do that? It's a simple mechanism. It wouldn't cost that much money but would actually give voice to these concerns, not in the ad hoc way in which this government treats our farmers: piecemeal; here and there, when things happen. No, take it seriously. Create a standing committee and make it happen.

Also stop attacking rural Ontario for the sake of other areas of the province. You're pitting rural Ontario against one another when it comes to a whole host of issues. You don't understand the idiosyncrasies of rural Ontario. The need for small schools: Yes, they may not be up to the same capacity as some urban areas but they are the heart-beat of those communities. They are what families and generations have relied on. The school might not look that pretty. It might not have a nice sheen on it—as the government likes to do and cut ribbons—but sometimes they're historic. They are places in which families have gathered for generations to play a role in their kids' education, to gather to support and celebrate their communities, and you're tearing that out of rural Ontario. It's a shame.

Then we close OB units; we close obstetrics and gynecology units in small rural hospitals, as they are in Leamington. What type of a signal does that send? There's no longer an area for to you have your child in this geographic location, so would you not think that that's going to affect the enrolment of small rural schools? They're directly connected. But the government doesn't see that because, again, they don't understand the needs—they don't understand rural Ontario, point final.

0920

But I would say that New Democrats do. That's why we certainly support our farmers. We look forward to working with them in concert, and we appreciate and value what they do for us each and every day. Again, when I drive down those rural roads in my beautiful riding of Essex county and I look at these big plots of land, I don't just see a commodity being grown. I see a small business. I see a family. I see a hub of community and connectivity. We know. We see the names, the namesakes on the barns, a proud history of agricultural production. That, without the right attention and without the right priority, could be lost. And it is at threat of being lost.

I hope the government understands the important nature of agricultural production. I hope they start to take it seriously, stop doing the ad hoc thing and actually value and implement legislation that adds value and supports the vital nature of agricultural production in this province.

Speaker, thank you very much and I thank the members for their attention.

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

Mr. Arthur Potts: It gives me great pleasure to respond to the member for Essex's comments on Bill 40, the agricultural crop act and the revisions we are making to it. Most certainly, this is going to be enabling legis-

lation which will allow us to expand the suite of products which will be under the Crop Insurance Act, and we're very, very proud of that direction forward. It helps level the playing field for Ontario farmers with all other farmers across the country and it's an important piece of legislation. I want to thank the member for his commitment and support for the bill.

The reality is that he supports it and he knows that the government is doing the right thing for farmers in Ontario, but then he turns around like so many rural members—they start with the praise and they praise the farmers but they don't see the reciprocal relationships. Yes, farmers feed cities and we're very, very proud and very, very supportive of that in urban Ontario, in the urban communities. But over 50% of food processing, Mr. Speaker, happens in urban ridings. And while farmers should be thanked by the people in the cities and the communities who eat the great food that they produce, at the same time farmers should be thanking cities because cities enrich farmers all the time. Being consumers in the field and understanding the importance of what the consumer wants is an extraordinarily important part of that reciprocal relationship.

I also want to talk to the fact that this government understands very well how important the farming community is in Ontario. One out of every eight jobs in Ontario is in agricultural production and processing, and so it's an extraordinarily important sector. We are providing stability. I sat yesterday at ROMA, speaking with municipalities from across Ontario, rural municipalities, talking about the stabilized funding we're giving them with the Ontario community investment fund. We're moving away from ad hoc application processes—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nipissing and the member from Essex.

Mr. Arthur Potts: —and we're moving toward stabilized, regular funding programs. I tell you, the members we spoke with—the representatives, the wardens, the Reeves, the councillors from rural Ontario—very much appreciate the stabilized funding. They know we're going in the right direction.

I appreciate the member and all the members opposite for their support of this bill.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to add to the comments by the member for Essex—more on his comments than on the bill itself. I think the member for Essex brought up a very valid point and one that is often forgotten in this chamber. When you look at Legislatures around the world and around Canada, our standing committees are somewhat unique in that we only deal with the business of the House in our standing committees, where many other Legislatures do have standing committees on agriculture or on industry, where those committees are tasked to look at those sectors of our economy and of our society to help engage those sectors, to listen to them and to bring forward legislative initiatives on their behalf.

I do hope the Minister of Agriculture and the parliamentary assistant are listening. I think it's a good, valid point. I think it behooves all of us in this Legislature to actually look at ways that we can improve the functionality and improve our execution of our responsibilities to our constituents. Standing committees on agriculture and other sectors would be one way that that could be accomplished.

I do hope—I don't see them, I'm looking around; I'm sure they must be listening on the TV or watching TV—that the minister and the parliamentary assistant are taking part in this debate—it's their bill—taking part in that debate—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Beaches–East York should stand up if he wants to make a point of order, instead of yelling across the floor. And the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington knows we don't kind of hint that someone is not here, okay? Thank you very much for your co-operation.

Continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you for clarifying that, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You're welcome.

Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I couldn't agree more with the comments that were made by the member from Essex that agricultural insurance is one of the fundamental tools we have to protect farmers and ensure our food security, but it is but one tool.

He also talked about what else could be done to make sure that we protect farmers. I will give you an example from Nickel Belt. We will all remember when the government, in its wisdom, decided to cancel the Slots at Racetracks Program. We have Sudbury Downs in Nickel Belt; we have a racetrack. We don't anymore. What do you figure happened to all of the hay farmers who used to grow their crops to feed those horses? The horses are gone. They have gone down south because every racetrack down south all got a deal, but the one and only racetrack in the north never got a deal. We don't have horse racing anymore. We don't have horses anymore, but we certainly do have a lot of farmers who are going through really tough times, because to change from growing the special hay that you need to feed a racehorse to growing anything else in Nickel Belt—we are not talking Niagara Peninsula here, we're talking Nickel Belt; it is not easy.

Hay had been growing in Nickel Belt and had been feeding the horses and had been sustaining the farmers. Because they had that cash crop coming in they could buy a trailer, buy a new tractor, invest in their barns, make sure that they were able to grow other crops that were sold throughout the farmers' market in my riding and in Sudbury, but all of this was taken away. A lot of my farmers don't farm anymore. A lot of tractors are up for sale and a lot of families are having a tough time. It

should have never gone down this way, Speaker. It should have never gone that way.

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

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to stand up in this House and speak to the Agriculture Insurance Act, 2014. I want to begin by thanking the member from Essex for his remarks and also for his support for this bill.

Agriculture is one of the major areas of our economy; actually, Ontario is known to be an agricultural province. Not very many people may be aware of this fact, but the reality is that we are one of the largest agriculture jurisdictions in Canada, apart from our very heavy manufacturing and other industrial base in this province. That's why our government is very keen to support our agriculture and the agri-food industry in Canada, in Ontario. For that reason we are expanding the insurance coverage for our agricultural industries in this province.

This act, the Agriculture Insurance Act, 2014, is going to provide that kind of coverage—which our farmers deserve, to have that kind of coverage. It will include so many crops; I may just list of some of them. It includes the areas of fresh vegetables, fruits, honey, processing vegetables, grains and oilseeds, tobacco and specialty crops. This is what this act is going to do. It's based on a premium paid by the farmers, paid by the Ontario government, as well as our federal partners.

I think this is a good act, and I support this. I urge all my colleagues in this House to support this act because we need to support our farmers to make sure that they have peace of mind when they put their crops, the seeds, in the ground. They have to have the peace of mind that their efforts are going to pay back when they get the harvest, and if something happens, government and insurance are there to help them. So I urge every member in this House to support this bill, Mr. Speaker.

0930

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Speaker. I want to thank the members for Beaches–East York, Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington, Nickel Belt and the Minister of MTCU and Research and Innovation.

I'll just explain once again that this is enabling legislation. It really just brings into the fold the possibility of protecting livestock and the honey industry; there are no regulatory changes or funding attached to the bill. New regulations would be needed before livestock farmers and other producers are protected under the Insurance Act, and new funding would be needed as well. So let's see that commitment.

As soon as we pass this bill, I would hope and expect that the government would attach a dollar value to what they're ready and prepared to support the industries with, but I won't hold my breath on that, given the austerity nature of this government.

I want to thank the member from Beaches–East York specifically, who used his two minutes to remind the

farmers of this province that they should be thankful for people eating their food, I guess is what his message was. I want to thank him for that little gem.

Applause.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Yes, you should give yourself applause because it will add to the highlight reel of films where I show members and farmers in rural Ontario exactly what this government thinks of agriculture producers in the province. They think that cities should be thankful that farmers even exist to be able to have the luxury of feeding them. That explains a whole lot in terms of their direction and their priorities when it comes to agriculture. That is a gem. That's the gift that keeps on giving, and I certainly appreciate the member for that.

I want to see some real, tangible effort put forward by this government. You've got a lot of work to do. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities: Let's see an apprenticeship program for young farmers. That's something that's easy to do. Farm families would love the ability to bring in new people to educate them and to teach them. That's something that you could easily do, and I know it would be welcomed by the industry.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Also, research and development: There's a huge gap there that's lacking.

I appreciate the time, Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to inform you that I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade; my colleague the member from Scarborough–Agincourt; and the member from Etobicoke Centre.

I've heard some very interesting comments today. I grew up in a rural part of Ontario—King township, population 800—surrounded by some of the most beautiful farmland that you can imagine. I will let you know that many a hot summer day was spent baling and bringing in very heavy bundles of hay. Many friends who are farmers and have invested their life in producing food for us to eat, and many contacts in the Holland Marsh area, specifically—the salad bowl of southern Ontario, as they like to call it.

I have an opportunity, because they're just north of my riding, to meet often with farmers in that area and to hear what their concerns are, and to bring their concerns to our rural caucus and the appropriate ministers.

They are very much looking for partnerships. They're not being drawn into divisive arguments, as the member opposite would try to have us be drawn into. We're not into divisive arguments about who owes what to whom; this is a symbiotic relationship. The farmers I know and the city folk I know are all thankful.

I thank the member from Essex for his opening comments.

I just wanted to spend a minute, really, to talk about this expanded suite of products and their offerings, and to

reaffirm that Ontario is committed to helping its agri-food partners manage risk. Business risk management programs, like production insurance, help producers deal with situations that are outside of their control, such as weather, disease and extreme market fluctuations.

Production insurance makes timely payments to producers and eliminates the need for costly ad hoc responses to adverse conditions. So this is a far better system for farmers, a far better system for government, a far better system for all of us, because it's far more predictive, far more controllable.

By giving more producers the opportunity to access production insurance, we'll help them to better manage their risk and encourage greater innovation, job creation and growth in the agri-food sector.

I can certainly say that from what I've learned of farmers throughout the Holland Marsh area and across Ontario, and even in my ancestral home of King township, farmers are among the most entrepreneurial people we have in this province, and if there is a way of doing something better and less expensively, they have found the way and are oftentimes the leaders in implementing that.

A lot of that, I think, goes back to the very good education system we have. I'm encouraged to see the number of friends and associates I have who have availed themselves of great agricultural courses at Guelph university and a number of colleges, to bring some science and business management to their farming operations—because as we all know, farms are businesses. You have to be a good business person, as well as an expert in horticulture, to be a good farmer.

In Canada, we have this national suite of integrated and complementary business risk management programs in place to help farmers manage risks that are beyond their control. It includes things like production insurance, which is the program I mentioned earlier, developed to help farmers address, in a timely manner, yield losses due to natural events related to weather, pests and disease.

Ontario's inability to offer production insurance plans for commodities beyond crop and perennial plants represents a significant gap in the suite of business risk management programs. That's why I think the introduction of this bill will address that need and help Ontario's farmers move forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would pass the floor to the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you, Speaker. It's really my pleasure to rise today to talk about these particular acts. I'm going to talk about it from a different angle. It will address the insurance part, but I'm going to come from a different angle.

After taking over the ministry, specifically the file on international trade—I think this is a very interesting file related to many other ministries in government; for example, trade related to natural resources, mineral mining,

trade related to energy, related to even education. But one big item here—trade, export—which is so hugely related, is the agriculture industry.

In 2010, the former Premier, Dalton McGuinty, and I were in China. At that time, we engaged a couple of stakeholders in China to talk about the food industry in China. We all know China is facing tremendous challenges in terms of their food safety, the quality and things like that.

So a few years passed, and last year Premier Kathleen Wynne and Minister Duguid and I were in China. We talked about clean tech and all that, and then we suddenly found out that in the agriculture industry in Canada, in Ontario, we do have a tremendous potential for engaging China, perhaps even India. The reason for that is when we were in China, a lot of large companies, medium-sized companies and small companies, all related to food or farming, approached us: "How is Ontario doing? We want to do more."

0940

To be specific, we engaged one of the largest companies in the world now, Alibaba. We talked to them, and in that particular meeting they actually told us right away, "Look, we want to market your Ontario products related to farming." When Prime Minister Harper went to China, he also met Alibaba, and then the news suddenly came out that in one day Alibaba sold over 90,000 Canadian lobsters to China. You can see the potential there. It's tremendous.

There are other countries—for example, two countries in the world, India and China, have 2.6 billion people. That's 40% of the world's population. Just imagine these two countries, all the people, eating our farming products. That will be tremendous potential for Ontario.

This is very interesting to me and very important now since I am the minister responsible for international trade, so I just wanted to talk about the significance.

After coming back from the October mission last year, I talked to the Premier, and the Premier told me, "Michael, go back to China. This time, really engage their agricultural industry." So the good news is that the Premier, just a couple of days ago, announced that Minister Jeff Leal, the agriculture minister, and I will be going to China in April to market our products, so that in Ontario, especially the rural areas, we can grow more and we can process more food, crops—cherries and blueberries and canola oil and ginseng and milk and pork and beef and fish. There's a lot of things that I can sell.

Thank you for the time. Soo Wong, it's your turn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I think he meant the member from Scarborough–Agincourt, but that's okay. Go ahead.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to rise today to speak in support of the proposed Agriculture Insurance Act, following the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade, as well as my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Speaker, both of my colleagues have spoken about why this particular bill is very important. I'm going to take a different lens to this particular bill.

As urban members in the city of Toronto, we value and respect our farmers. As one of the members who has a history with farming—I'm not sure a lot of members know that my grandparents on my mother's side own one of the largest poultry farms in mainland China. Furthermore, I have extended family friends who—my good colleague from Beaches–East York talked about bok choy. They are large producers in the northern part of Toronto. So I have, not just as a consumer of Ontario-grown food, an appreciation for the value of farmers and what they do every day.

The proposed legislation, if passed, will work with the federal government in terms of the national integrated and complementary business risk management programs to help farmers in a time of need, especially when it comes to natural disasters, the weather, insects and what have you.

This legislation also allows us to participate in production insurance, a program that will help farmers address yield losses in a timely manner due to natural incidents related to weather, pests and disease. If the legislation is passed—and there is going to be an amendment—the new plan will help the government to develop and implement a new production insurance plan in the following areas:

In terms of operational, there will be the development of a plan, including working with stakeholders. Oftentimes, we hear from the opposition parties criticizing the government for not including stakeholders. The proposed amendment of the legislation will allow the government to reach out to discuss with stakeholders, particularly the farmers who are going to be affected by this proposed legislation.

It will also talk about third-party certification by an actuary. That's a good thing.

It will also mean working with the federal government, and you've heard from me—having been critical of the federal government involvement, and supporting the province of Ontario. It will verify and agree on actuarial assessment and ensure compliance with the national regulations and guidelines. Furthermore, it will also mean the fiscal authorities—it will mean that through the Treasury Board there will be financial approvals.

The other very important part of the proposed legislation is, if passed, it will allow the minister, in terms of regulations—

Interjections.

Ms. Soo Wong: Mr. Speaker, this is very disrespectful. We hear this third party conversation across when we have very important debate here on this particular bill.

With respect to this legislation, if passed, the minister will set up a regulation in terms of our agricultural products that will be eligible for coverage under the production insurance. The initial minister's regulation would include the crops and perennial plants, which already occurs, but will also include new agri-foods—because we know that every day, there is new food produce, and we know farmers are very innovative. But more importantly, they are very creative in bringing new food to our tables and to our dining rooms.

Mr. Speaker, I hear my colleagues opposite are supportive of the bill, and I'm hopeful that this bill will soon go to committee.

At the end of the day, the Ontario agriculture sector is a huge growth industry and, if passed, it will continue to grow. By giving the producers, meaning the farmers, greater opportunity to access production insurance, we are actually helping to manage risk better and encourage innovation, profitability and most importantly, job creation, in this very large agri-food sector.

I'm going to turn it over to my colleague from Etobicoke Centre. I'm sure he's going to have some really innovative comments about this proposed legislation.

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

Mr. Yvan Baker: I am thrilled to be speaking to this bill. I'm elected from the riding of Etobicoke Centre, which is a riding within the city of Toronto, but I'm proud to speak to this bill for a number of reasons. I'd like to share with you what those are.

First of all, last year, many parts of the city—and Etobicoke was one of the parts of the city that was hardest hit—went through some very serious flooding. A lot of people in my community were impacted. I distinctly remember this last year, when knocking on doors during the election campaign, speaking with people who still hadn't recovered from that tragedy, from those floods. Those floods had gutted thousands of people's basements. The impact wasn't just financial; it wasn't just economic. People's lives were washed away. Some of the folks who I met had lost wedding photos, had lost mementos, had lost things of tremendous sentimental value in addition to incurring tremendous financial costs. One of the lessons that I took away from speaking with those people in my community was that a lot of the folks thought that they were covered by insurance. Some were, but many were not.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton might want to sit down.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Many of the folks were deeply impacted by that. So the importance of insurance in protecting people's livelihoods is a really important issue, one that touched our community directly. It's one of the reasons I am honoured to speak to this bill—because that's what this bill is about. For me, it's about protecting the livelihoods of people who are trying to support their families, who are making an important economic contribution to our province.

Business risk management programs like production insurance help producers deal with situations that are outside their control: weather, disease and extreme market fluctuations. Production insurance makes timely payments to producers—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There seems to be some cross-floor debate going on, and I can't even hear the speaker. If you want to yell at each other, go outside and yell at each other. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate that.

Production insurance makes timely payments to producers and eliminates a need for costly ad hoc programs. Giving more producers the opportunity to access production insurance will help them better manage risk and encourage greater innovation and job creation because when businesses have stability in the marketplace—and I know this from my business experience—that encourages investment; that encourages commitment on the part of businesses. So this is really, again, about managing risk, about protecting livelihoods and encouraging investment in a sector that's tremendously important to our economy.

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If I may, I'd just like to say a few quick things about the importance of our agri-food sector. Again, I come from a riding here in Toronto, but we can't underestimate the importance of the agri-food sector. This is a sector that generates significant impact on our gross domestic product and significant employment, but of course it's a sector that serves everyone in Ontario. This is something that, whether we're from an urban riding, a suburban riding or a rural riding, I hope all the members of the House will rally around.

In Canada, we have, of course, a national suite of integrated business risk management programs that include production insurance, and Ontario's inability to offer production insurance plans for commodities beyond crops and perennial plants represents a significant gap in that suite.

But the thing I'd like to also mention is the importance of how the insurance is structured. Currently, when participants in the agri-food sector are hit hard, they have to come to the government for ad hoc support. One of the things that I think about a lot is how we can manage our taxpayers' money as effectively as possible, and insurance programs are an excellent way of doing that because the contributions to that program are shared. They're shared by the producers, who are the investors, but they're also shared by the provincial and federal governments.

When I think about this, this is a really important way of making sure that our provincial government has some stability, that we're prepared for some of the disasters that might strike our agri-food producers, but it also makes sure that the cost of this is spread evenly and predictably across those participants. That's a really important element. It's not just about managing risk. It's not just about protecting people's livelihoods, but it's also about sharing costs and managing taxpayer dollars responsibly.

The other thing I would say is that this amendment that we're speaking to today doesn't have an immediate financial impact. This just allows us to extend what is already an important and successful program to more producers cross Ontario.

We have an agri-food sector that's critical to our economy. It serves all of Ontario. It helps manage risk. It encourages investment and innovation. It allows us to manage taxpayers' dollars wisely. I support this. I know

the members on this side support it, and I hope all members of the Legislature will support this.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's a pleasure to rise and talk a little bit about agriculture. It's interesting to note—and some people in this Legislature may not be fully aware—that a tremendous amount of agriculture actually happens in northern Ontario.

I'm a northern boy. I've lived there all my life, but even I was surprised when I went to the New Liskeard research centre—which is under threat of being closed. We're hoping that this government will continue to see the importance of the New Liskeard research centre. But I was amazed to find out just how much canola and oats are grown in northern Ontario. In one instance, almost half of our production comes from there. It's quite fascinating. When you think of the north, you don't necessarily think of agriculture.

It was interesting to see that seed potatoes are all started at this New Liskeard research facility. Basically, they start in a test tube. It was fascinating to go through that and have that entire learning experience. When you think of strawberries—they're started in the New Liskeard research centre as well. It was quite an exciting and fascinating day, and I would hope that all members would avail themselves of a trip up north and have a look at the plentiful agriculture that's there.

This New Liskeard research centre also has 455 head of cattle. They do the research there on growing cattle in winter climates. Again, it's a fascinating and ultra-interesting challenge to see.

I would hope that the members would at least, if they can't get up to the New Liskeard research centre and learn a little bit more about what's happening there, certainly contact my office. We'd be delighted to share with them the many and exciting agricultural opportunities that are available in the north.

This weekend, my wife, Patty, and I will be in Powassan for the farmers' luncheon. It's an annual event. We'll meet with the cattle folk. We will meet with the growers. It's always a spectacular opportunity, Speaker.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Indeed, it's a pleasure to rise and speak to this important bill and the comments that have been made so far.

My riding is largely an urban riding, but a good portion of the Tecumseh side is rural. We have the Bonduelle plant, as the minister knows, and a large farming population. In the Essex county portion, we have, as the member from Essex said, huge greenhouse operations as well, and we have some of the largest mushroom farms in Ontario. When I go to my grocery store to buy mushrooms—if I want to get a can of mushrooms, they're from China. If I want to buy fresh mushrooms, they're from Ontario.

When the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade said he was going to take the Minister

of Agriculture to China in April, I said, “What an opportunity for the government to reach out across the aisle.” Take the member from Essex; take the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, the agriculture critics in the House—take them with them on this trade mission and let them get a feel for what the possibilities are of more international trade on the agricultural side. That shows that you’re listening. That shows that you can work together on major events. I know that others have spoken this morning about travelling committees. This wouldn’t exactly be a travelling committee, but it would certainly be an outreach opportunity.

When I hear the members from Toronto say, if I paraphrase, “Good things grow in Ontario, but it’s because we process them in Toronto; that’s when it really matters,” I say: Minister, you have to read the Hansard to see what your member from Beaches–East York had to say earlier today. I think it’s well worth the read.

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

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I’m so pleased to rise today to speak to this very important bill. The greater Toronto area is actually one of the largest food production areas in Ontario. The relationship between our agri-producers and our production and manufacturing is very, very strong and interdependent. I’m, frankly, amazed at how many manufacturing and finished goods start off with agri-products as their base input. That’s a very good thing. We know that one of the reasons why our food production cluster is so vast is because of the diversity that we have in this province and in this region that really supports that manufacturing base.

I do believe that one of the reasons why Ontario’s economy is strong and resilient is because of the diversity of all of our employment clusters. They are interrelated and they work together to support Ontario’s economy.

What I really see here in the direction of this bill is that Ontario is committed to helping our agri-food partners manage risk. That is also very important in terms of providing stability and allowing our agri-food producers to really focus on what they do best. We know that they are hard-working. I’ve actually just been out on consultations. I’ve met many, many of them. They’re such a diverse group, a hard-working group, and ought to be supported to ensure that our agri-food sector remains strong and globally competitive. Starting with the strong and diverse and rich economy here in Ontario, we need to make sure that we manage that risk and strengthen the sector as a whole.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It’s a privilege to speak to Bill 40. I do like the fact that extended coverage will be given to farmers who produce their products, other than crops and perennials.

I do have some concerns. I recall back, I believe it was in the 2011 election, there was a promise made by the government to, in fact, waive the first-year premium for crop insurance. I don’t know if that’s going to be ad-

ressed in this particular bill or not, but it’s something for consideration. I don’t know what that would actually cost this government, who appear to be somewhat in the red—no pun intended. But that is a concern that I would ask them to look at.

Chatham–Kent–Essex is very rich in agriculture. As a matter of fact, there are over—or close to, anyway—2,200 farms in the Chatham–Kent–Essex area. Of course, Leamington, which is a proud area in my riding, is the greenhouse capital of Canada, and we’re very, very proud of that.

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Unfortunately, this government had a problem with Heinz. We lost 740 jobs there, and 250 part-time, but thank goodness, Highbury Canco came in and at least we have 250 jobs there, and that’s a good thing.

The only other thing I would like to touch upon, Speaker, is the neonics issue. That’s a serious issue right now. I met with farmers and seed growers—that represented over 80% of the seed-growing in Canada—at a farm in my riding, the Devolder farm, along with our critic, Toby Barrett, with regard to the neonics. Some 80% of these people are—well, they’re wanting to reduce the neonics, and that’s a major issue in this area. I really hope the government takes a better look at it, or else crop insurance is going to go sky-high.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from—there were five speakers, so whoever takes it—Newmarket–Aurora, I guess, for the two minutes.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the ability to bring some closure to today’s discussions about the Agriculture Insurance Act, 2014.

I’m so glad to hear the continuing debate, the continuing discussion, around the importance of the agri-food industry, both the growing and the processing of that food. It has been noted that this is an area that has the potential for considerable growth, and that speaks volumes. That’s very positive for the economy of Ontario and for all of us in Ontario, regardless of where you live, rural or urban. I’m glad to hear that move ahead.

I just wanted to touch on a couple of key points of this proposed legislation that we perhaps didn’t get to today, just to reinforce that this production insurance is premium-based. The costs are shared by farmers and government, and that encourages best practices and the appropriate sharing of risk. As I said earlier, farmers, in my experience, are among the greatest entrepreneurs this country has produced, and we look forward to supporting them.

An expanded production insurance program could, if passed, provide financial assistance but divide the costs between the federal government, the provincial government and producers in a predictable and incremental way over a much larger time period.

Ontario’s agricultural sector, as has been mentioned, has huge potential for growth and the Agriculture Insurance Act will, if passed, allow for this growth to happen. By giving more producers the opportunity to access production insurance, we would help them manage risk better and encourage greater innovation, greater profitability

and greater job creation in the agri-food sector. I do hope that this House supports the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. You seem to be practising that, so that's good.

I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. I've reviewed some of the insightful comments by our critic from Haldimand–Norfolk, somebody who has been trained—I think he has a master's in science and agriculture—and who has certainly worked in the industry and is very familiar with the agriculture of his region.

The agriculture across the province is very varied. Agriculture in our area is probably the largest agricultural sector in eastern Ontario, and it's quite different than the crops and produce in western Ontario. We've talked about the greenhouse industry in western Ontario, something we don't see in the east, but certainly soybeans and corn are major industries, along with dairy, which is shared with some of the areas in the north.

Current legislation that supports some 90 products was enacted by the Mike Harris government. The critic here talked about the consultation that went on during the bill, the different readings—they went around the province; they talked to various farming groups—and also, when it came time to put in regulations, further consultation to try to get it right.

Now we have some legislation where the bill for the products that are there works fairly well. No question, we need to go further. We've seen some major disasters when it came to some of our products that aren't covered. So it's certainly time to move on. But it gives an example of just how the industry that lives and breathes farming throughout the community really needs to get their input.

You're looking at a government here that collectively needed five people just to talk 20 minutes on this bill because of the lack of experience; I think they have one member that has an agricultural base, and he's not even here today. It just shows that we need that consultation to find out and get this right. I think that's a point that we have to look at.

Look at the consultation and what has not happened under this government. The Kemptville College example: a major educational institution in my region, certainly the only English-language institution in eastern Ontario, closed without any consultation, without any notice. There's some sugar-coating that we're going to put a committee together to look at it. Over the years I had five brothers who went to that college; and nephews. Actually, in the last graduating class that's just finishing up this year, my nephew Sam is going through. It's too bad that he has the last opportunity.

Various parents throughout my region came to me and told me last year that their son was hoping to go to Kemptville and would not have that opportunity. I have to say that in most cases they didn't go on to post-secondary. They didn't go on to somewhere else, and

that's very typical of the agricultural college enrolment. They tend to go to the institutions that are close. It allows them to be home on the weekends. They didn't travel to almost Windsor, to go to Sarnia; or to Ridgeway, to go to the college up there. You can imagine it's just impractical even to get home on the weekends. It's barely a full day's drive; you're lucky to get through Toronto.

If they really had an initiative to look after agriculture, decisions like that wouldn't be made. Certainly, they would have planned ahead; they just wouldn't be closed. We're looking at a community that raised a couple of million dollars locally to build the new dairy farm research facility just a couple of years ago—money that was gathered from the community that could have been put into the hospital. Now it's in an empty shell, the cows moved to Guelph, the quota with it, the robots. It's just not an efficient way of running anything, let alone the agriculture industry. It really speaks spades for just what the interest is with this.

Agriculture is a tough business. I look at last year: In our area we had, of course, a cold winter. At that time we hadn't experienced many cold winters so we complained about it and we're hit again, of course, this year with one. It led to a late spring, a wet spring, a lot of concern about getting crops in. We were lucky, we got three or four days. The farms now are fairly well set up so that when they get a break they can get a lot of crops in. So we got our crops in a little bit late, but relatively—at that time it seemed okay, but then we ran into a fairly wet summer. Then what seemed to be really horrific at the time, we had an extremely early frost—not just a mild frost but an extremely heavy frost—just before the plowing match. I know my brother was quite upset with it because he thought that was it, the corn wasn't—but it came along and, actually, we had a fairly good crop in eastern Ontario.

It was different in western Ontario; they didn't get that break in the springtime. They didn't get the crops in until much later. They ran into a cool summer; they didn't get the frost but the crops didn't mature. So, really, they had a much more serious problem out there.

In eastern Ontario the wet summer—we had a huge mould problem. Soybeans—interesting because you could really pick out the fields and the varieties that were not a problem before, but all of a sudden losses—one of our neighbours, one stretch of land was 100% lost to the mould. So a lot of issues can happen there.

You get something in early—the wet summer, warm summer, mould. Then you've got to deal with crop prices. Farming, it's a science; it really depends on a lot of factors. Then you have to worry about our neighbours. What's the climate down there? Is there going to be a half-decent price at the end of the year, if they have a good crop in the States? They certainly have a lot more favourable climate, generally. So it's not an easy thing.

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The insurance really is important. If we're going to expect that we can survive—there are lots of years when North America depends on Canadian supply. If we don't

protect that, as you can imagine, if we don't have the food and the Americans don't have it, where are we going to go for that? A lot of countries in the world depend on Canadian food, so the insurance does a lot more than just protect our farmers. It's really protecting our livelihood up here.

We're looking at the enabling legislation here. We're looking to see just what it covers. We're hoping that there is sufficient consultation as we go around, getting it right. There are a lot of things to deal with here.

We talked about the PED virus going around through the pig industry just a couple of years ago.

Part of our strategy has to be working with our markets, which are the Americans. They're doing a lot of research. We should leverage that. We should work with them and find out the best practices, because if we don't mirror a lot of their best practices, they won't have the confidence to buy our food. Not only will it help us get more for the money we spend on research, but it actually does a lot for the market down the road.

Hopefully, since the markets are so integrated, with product back and forth—I think Toby mentioned that we ship our product down. They go down to the same markets that the American hogs are going to. It seemed like the virus started down there. The trucks come back and it's carried back. The same could happen in reverse.

We have to make sure that the technology and the research we do looks at that integrated market. At the same time, they have been interested in making sure it works for us. We want to make sure that that's actually put in there.

We're looking now at hog herds in Ontario. They're about 30% less than they were just a short time ago.

It's the same thing with BSE. In our area, BSE—we don't have as big a beef industry, but it really hurt our dairy industry. I remember young calves being shipped off to market, and it used to be income that supplemented the dairy. It actually cost money. By the time you paid for the transportation and the auctioneering, you actually had a bill to send small calves to market. It just shows some of the issues that—how integrated the different markets are. I think it's important that if we're going to have an impact, we have to do that. We have to look at the overall market and the overall areas.

Certainly, this government—I look at our area in eastern Ontario, and rural Ontario, where I grew up, and a lot of things, the way it used to be, and some of the programs that they've brought out, and I don't think they've really considered what happens in rural Ontario.

I know I just have a minute, so I'll just go on to this.

I was at a ROMA conference just after this government took over. They came out with some new environmental regulations around water. There needed to be some things tightened up there.

One of the delegates stood up and said, "You just passed some legislation. We have a small park in our region, and we had a Johnny-on-the-spot. So the community got together, and we raised some money. We built a small building, and we put in a well, a flush toilet

and a sink to wash your hands. Now you're telling us we have to lock the door and put the Johnny-on-the-spot back. Is that what you're telling us?"

The then Minister of Agriculture—she was also the Minister of the Environment—stood up and said, "That's exactly what I'm telling you, because there's nobody going to die on my watch."

So you think back. Okay, you've taken a little bit of research and a little bit of knowledge, but what happens when you don't wash your hands? Health has come to the point where we know that people need to—proper hygiene is important. I guess we've got grass that we can rub our hands on. But that's the logic: Rural Ontario is a little bit different. We don't have piped water everywhere. We can be miles away from the nearest water supply. There are ways around that. But they were forced to shut the building.

We've had the same issues in our area. We live there on well water. We survive very well. There are issues that you have to look at, but it's manageable. That's what we have to do: We have to look at rural solutions.

I guess my time is up. I'll have a chance to finish later on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thank the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, who will continue with his submission the next time we discuss this bill.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It is now 10:15. This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before we do introduction of guests, just to announce that the students from the model Parliament will be coming into the House. I will be acknowledging them to save us from 96 members standing up and introducing individuals. That would be my preference. I'm not going to stop you from doing so, but we won't have five minutes of doing that. So I'm just announcing to you that when they do come, I'll announce them, if that's okay with you, and it will help us save on introductions.

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's my pleasure today to introduce Karen Mote and Les Mote, who are the parents—the proud parents, I might add—of Madison Mote, who is today the page captain.

I also have the privilege of introducing a constituent of mine for the model Parliament, Nicholas Ferreira.

Mr. Mike Colle: I'd like to welcome a constituent of mine who is here as part of a lobby group supporting aHUS Canada. They're here on their information day at Queen's Park. Her name is Jennifer Hamilton. Welcome, Jennifer.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to welcome from Huntsville Mr. Gordon Daw, who has been down getting some medical treatment at hospitals in the area; his daughter, who is well-known around Queen's Park,

Lesley Daw; and occupational therapist Lauren Schwartz, who is here for the first time at Queen's Park. Welcome.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome this morning Adam Van Meerbergen, a student in grade 10 at Resurrection Catholic Secondary School in Kitchener. Adam is participating in today's Ontario model Parliament. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm happy to welcome aHUS Canada to Queen's Park today. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to supporting patients and families living with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome. With us today, we have: Michael Eygenraam; Margriet Eygenraam; Sonia Giroto; Sonia's son Joshua; and Toni Vernon. Thank you.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce Zach Misener from Stratford. Zach is participating in the model Parliament program today.

Ms. Catherine Fife: On behalf of Cindy Forster, it's also my pleasure this morning to welcome Jake Falardeau, who lives in the riding of Welland and is also participating in this year's Ontario model Parliament. Jake is here with his grandmother Pauline. Today also happens to be Jake's 16th birthday. Happy birthday, Jake, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Good morning. I'd like to introduce page Niko Hoogeveen's father, Dr. Paul Hoogeveen. Welcome to the public gallery.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is my pleasure to welcome Kedron elementary school here, from my riding of Oshawa. I was pleased to run into them on their tour today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: Merci, monsieur le Président. I'll be very, very careful this morning. Il me fait grand plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue au maire de Clarence-Rockland, M. Guy Desjardins. I won't introduce a former MPP for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell; I'll give you that honour, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A very wise choice.

Mr. Grant Crack: But I'd also like to welcome TVO to Queen's Park today. We all know TVO from TVOKids and the content that they provide for our young folks. As well, of course, everybody knows The Agenda with Steve Paikin. There is a reception tonight from 5 to 7 at Queen's Park, and I would welcome everyone down to visit TVO Ontario.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to welcome my beautiful granddaughter Rachel Rynard, who is in the model Parliament here today representing Simcoe North.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That one I can forgive.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'd like to introduce a beautiful 29-year-old to members of the Legislature: my seatmate from Halton. She's 29 years old today.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I do want everyone introduced.

The member from London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today Ghadeir Madlol, who is here with the model Parliament. She is the sister of current page Muntder Madlol and former page Mustfah Madlol, all of whom are from London West. Welcome.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'd like to introduce Joshua DeBortoli and his mother, Sonia Giroto, who are here with us at Queen's Park today for the aHUS lobby day, and also Samantha Mariano, who is representing Vaughan during the 2015 Legislative Assembly of Ontario model Parliament.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to welcome two of my students in Scarborough–Agincourt, Daven Siu and Kevin Vuong, who is also the Minister of Labour for the model Parliament. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd like to introduce Leah Cash. She's the cousin of Natalie McLean. She joins us today in the Legislature—welcome—to support our wonderful Natalie McLean, a page here at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I'd like to introduce Beverly and Richard Fiacconi. Beverly has been a constituency assistant in my office since 2003. Her daughter Courtney Fiacconi is here as part of the model Parliament today.

Mr. Han Dong: I would like to welcome my good friend and former colleague Chris Yaccato, representing the Lung Association.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I seek unanimous consent to mark Pink Shirt Day by inviting all members to remain in the Legislature after question period for a group photo.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have heard that this was coming and I just want to express that the normal convention is not to use the House as that kind of a vehicle. I just caution everyone that there are ways to do this—I don't want this not done—but I will put the unanimous consent on the floor.

Do we have unanimous consent? I heard a no.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, that's very disappointing that we don't have unanimous consent, but I do invite all members to go to the main staircase for a group photo after question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay. Thank you. As a continuation of the discussion: It is now advised that all members who want to participate in Pink Shirt Day would assemble. I don't think it matters if you actually are wearing pink; if you want to show support and have your picture taken at the main staircase, it would be advisable. I appreciate the member's flexibility in my concern.

Further introductions?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I didn't finish that, but I'll do the rotation. It is your turn. The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

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Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to welcome Ashlyn Simpson, who's here for the model Parliament, from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I'd like to welcome her to the Legislature.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to welcome Fionntan Ferris and Dana Nasr, who are here from London West to participate in the Ontario model Parliament.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to introduce three special guests today; first, my daughter, Oriana, who's in the gallery. She's participating in this year's model Parliament. Hello, Oriana. Also here today is Charlie Violin. Charlie is another student from Halton participating in the model Parliament. Thirdly, in the members' east gallery is my new intern from the University of Akron, Ohio: Jermaine Collins. Welcome to our team and welcome to Queen's Park, Jermaine. Good to have you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm going to join the gang now and welcome, from my riding, Devin Reynolds, who is also participating in the model Parliament today and tomorrow.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's my pleasure to introduce a member from my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, Muneed Javed, who is participating in the model Parliament today.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to welcome, from the great riding of Leeds–Grenville, Alicia Sutton, who's here for the model Parliament. I look forward to being the Speaker Friday morning in the model Parliament, so I get to—the tables are turned now, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, am I looking forward to that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I tried.

The deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like to introduce William Alexander from the riding of St. Catharines, who is participating in the model Parliament.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I just noticed that the Vernons are here, who are from the beautiful riding of Don Valley East—Toni and her husband, I believe. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Grant Crack: It also gives me great pleasure to introduce the acting CAO of the city of Clarence-Rockland. Helen Collier is with us. Welcome. I believe that Mr. Desjardins's wife is with us as well. So welcome.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I know you're introducing everyone here for the Ontario model Parliament. I know I have three here from Pickering–Scarborough East, but I want to welcome all students for this program. It's a great program. Welcome to all of you. Thank you for being here. As Minister of Children and Youth Services, I think this is a fantastic program.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Joining us for the model Parliament, we have Agi Kapllani, Theresa Nguyen and Michelle Wang. I'd like to thank them for participating and for being here today.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'd also like to recognize Kieran Lawlor, who's here from Beaches–East York for the model Parliament. Welcome.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I also have a visitor. It's Jack Ainsworth, and he is from my riding from Nickel Belt.

Welcome to Toronto and welcome to Queen's Park. He's with the model Parliament.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want the record to show that I tried. I was going to do this anyway.

We have with us today, in the public galleries on both sides, the 84 students from across the province participating in the second annual Legislative Assembly of Ontario model Parliament.

I not only would like to thank all the parties for participating and ensuring that this is to be done the way it should be done, but I think we also owe the staff here at the Legislature a great deal of gratitude for the work they've done on the model Parliament this year.

In the Speaker's gallery, we have His Worship Guy Desjardins, mayor of Clarence-Rockland, and his spouse, Aline Desjardins; Ms. Helen Collier, the city administrator; and M. Jean-Marc Lalonde from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell in the 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th and 39th Parliaments. Welcome.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Christine Elliott: My question is for the Premier.

Premier, you included the following in your mandate letter to the Minister of Health: "Continuing the pursuit of affordable drug access for patients.... This will include a coordinated process for approving new and expensive drugs to minimize the wait for people who need these life-saving medications."

Premier, notwithstanding the minister's last-minute half-baked announcement this morning, why are you allowing him to fail in this mandate?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm not sure if patients and families of patients that are suffering from atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome, aHUS, would agree with the member opposite that it was a half-baked announcement this morning.

Not by myself, but several days ago the executive officer of the Ontario Public Drug Programs—because this is not a political decision; this is a decision made by clinical experts and bureaucrats searching through the best and most reliable information available. Several days ago I was informed that the executive officer will now provide Soliris to patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome, or aHUS, who meet defined clinical criteria of the disease.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Christine Elliott: Back to the Premier: We're joined by Michael Eygenraam, Joshua DeBortoli and other patients suffering from aHUS who have been waiting for two years for Soliris, the only medication that can actually help them.

I would note how convenient it is that the announcement was made today. I guess it takes a little bit of the heat off of you, but I think people need to know that this

is not going to be funded for all aHUS patients. It's only a one-off strategy. Only those who are really, really sick are going to be able to get access to this, not everybody who needs it. I think that's important for the people of Ontario and the patients who are here in good faith to know.

My question to you, Premier, is: Given the fact that 40 other countries have approved this and it has been approved in the province of Quebec, and the clinical evidence is there that it can actually extend lives and save people, will you commit to permanent funding for Soliris for these patients today?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I don't think the people of Ontario want to take the word of the member opposite in terms of the science and clinical evidence behind this decision. Quite frankly, they shouldn't take my word either, even though I'm a practising physician and a public health specialist. But they should take the word and the combined evidence that was provided by our office—not my political office, but by the office of the Ontario Public Drug Programs when they consulted with advocacy groups; when they consulted with other jurisdictions around the world, including Australia and England; when they consulted with the very physicians and specialists that are providing support to these individuals with aHUS. Their combined decision on clinical evidence and science was to provide this solution to those that meet the clinical, eligible criteria for this disease, to provide them with the Soliris treatment that they have asked for.

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

Ms. Christine Elliott: I would suggest that the Minister of Health is trying to have it both ways. He's saying that he's going to fund Soliris, but then there's not clinical evidence in some cases to allow it, so I'm not really sure what he's planning on saying here.

But the fact of the matter is that time after time after time, patients who are facing these devastating diseases have to come to Queen's Park to advocate—put the pressure on you and get media attention in order to get access to the drugs that they really need to save their lives. This has to stop.

Will you commit today to permanent funding for Soliris for the patients who need it?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I truly believe that the member opposite, in her heart of hearts, supports a process which is apolitical; that reaches out to the exact specialists, clinical experts and scientists who know more than you and I will ever know about this condition; that reaches out to the advocates of this illness, the patients and their families; that looks around the world at other jurisdictions that have also resolved this challenging question. In her heart of hearts, I believe that she supports the decision that these clinical experts and these bureaucrats and these officials have made.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Christine Elliott: My question again is to the Premier.

Premier, when you replaced Dalton McGuinty, you promised to do things differently and turn the page on a decade of Liberal scandals. But less than a year into the job, same old same old.

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Let there be no mistake: Your failure to remove Pat Sorbara from her job, even temporarily, means that you have chosen to make this scandal worse and erode the integrity reposed in your office.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Ms. Christine Elliott: Premier, I remind you that Premier McGuinty kept senior staff in his office while they were—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will have order. The Minister of Education, come to order.

Please finish.

Ms. Christine Elliott: Premier, I remind you that Premier McGuinty kept senior staff in his office, even under criminal investigation. That resulted in deleted emails and destroyed evidence.

Don't make the same mistake. Show Ontarians the integrity that the Deputy Premier says that you have. Restore confidence in your leadership and show Pat Sorbara the door.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the member opposite knows I have taken, and do take, this matter very seriously. Elections Ontario has determined that the allegations against me and the member for Sudbury were baseless. We'll continue to co-operate fully with the investigation, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to do that.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member for Nepean—Carleton, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Chief Electoral Officer, as the member opposite knows, has clearly stated, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

The investigations are entirely independent. The Public Prosecution Service of Canada has been retained.

Mr. Speaker, I really believe that we need to let the investigation run its course. That's what we need to do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Christine Elliott: This isn't out of your hands. There's still a lot that you can do. Why don't you restore some semblance of integrity to your office? Try to protect the integrity of your office, the integrity of the police investigation, the integrity of the Sudbury police board, the integrity of our electoral system and the integrity that Ontarians place in their elected officials.

You can start doing this by directing the secretary of cabinet to seize Ms. Sorbara's computer, and preserve all of her emails, her telephone records and anything else that may lend itself to a police investigation. Will you at least direct the secretary of cabinet to do that?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, Mr. Speaker—*Interjections.*

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, Mr. Speaker, let me address the issues—sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I was using my silent stare.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm just not sure whether to sit or stand.

Mr. Speaker, first let me address the issues arising out of recommendations that came to us through the Information and Privacy Commissioner over the last year or so. We have made many changes in my office and across government. We have put training in place in terms of retention of documents. Those procedures are already in place, so I can reassure the member opposite that those procedures have changed. They are in place; the training has been done.

On the second issue, I really believe that in order for the investigation to be able to continue—as the member knows, it is an independent process. The best thing that we can do is to let it unfold, Mr. Speaker. That actually preserves the integrity of the process and of the investigation, so we're going to let it unfold as it must.

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

Ms. Christine Elliott: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the so-called procedures that have been put in place, there is a pattern of Liberal staffers destroying evidence here. So I want to ask the Premier what steps she has taken to limit Pat Sorbara's access to the levers of power.

Have you stripped her of any authority? Have you ordered anyone to preserve her telephone records? Have you ordered that the hard drives and computers be turned over to the OPP so they don't get wiped, like they did in the gas plants scandal? As leader of the Liberal Party, have you ordered party officials to preserve any evidence at Liberal Party headquarters as far as Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed are involved?

Please, Premier, tell us at least you're doing something here.

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I've answered these questions over and over again. I made a statement last Friday that made it clear what my position is. We need to let the independent investigation unfold as it will.

There are a lot of issues that we could be talking about, Mr. Speaker. Many of our members have been at the ROMA/OGRA conference. There are a lot of issues that

we could be talking about. In fact, the member opposite could be asking about our announcement this morning to provide funding to build and repair critical infrastructure for small, rural and northern municipalities. The member opposite could be asking about the need for continued action across Canada to invest in public infrastructure. That's a crying need. The member opposite could be asking about the round table tomorrow on missing and murdered aboriginal women that a number of my members and I will be attending. She could be asking about that. Those are very, very important issues.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question. The leader of the third party.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday the Deputy Premier complained that the opposition continues to insist that the Premier answer some very important questions. Sorry to disappoint the Deputy Premier, but we're going to continue to do just that.

So my question is: Who told Pat Sorbara to offer Andrew Olivier a job?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I have and I do take this matter very, very seriously. I have answered dozens of questions, tens of questions in this House. I will continue to answer those questions.

I made a statement last Friday making it clear what my position is. Elections Ontario has determined that the allegations against me and the member for Sudbury were baseless. We'll continue to co-operate fully with the independent investigation. The Chief Electoral Officer has stated, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

These investigations are entirely independent, and I believe that to preserve the integrity of the investigation we need to let it unfold.

It doesn't matter how many times I am asked the question. I have answered, I will continue to answer and I have just given the answer that I will continue to repeat.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, what does matter is who told Gerry Lougheed to offer Andrew Olivier a job. Perhaps she can answer that question.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, the investigation is not being conducted in this Legislature. I have answered questions. I have made very clear my position. I've made it clear that I believe the investigation is separate, that the integrity of the investigation needs to be maintained and we do that by allowing it to be independent.

I take this matter very seriously. I have answered questions and we will continue to co-operate fully with the investigation. I hope the members opposite will do the same.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The matter of who gave Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed the instructions to offer that job is an extremely, extremely serious question. But the Premier has ducked that very question 24 times in this chamber.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Stop the clock. I ask again calmly: Please, decorum. Let the question be put; let the answer be answered.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Twenty-four times that question has been asked and not answered. The Deputy Premier can actually take note of that as she scores up the questions.

When the Premier refuses to answer, it isn't just that she's showing a lack of respect for me or the people in this chamber; she's showing a lack of respect for the people of Ontario, because these answers are not just for me and they're not just for us. This isn't a silly game. The answers are for the people of this province and they deserve those answers.

So, once again—number 25—I'm going to ask the Premier: Who told Gerry Lougheed and Pat Sorbara to offer a job to Mr. Olivier so he wouldn't run for the nomination in Sudbury?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Because I fundamentally challenge the premise of the question, I say to the member opposite that I have answered those questions. I have made a clear statement of what happened in the Sudbury by-election and why I chose Glenn Thibeault to be the candidate. I made that decision.

There is an investigation going on. That investigation is independent. We need to let that investigation unfold and that's what we're going to do.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. According to Elections Ontario and the OPP, there is evidence that Andrew Olivier was offered a job—offered a bribe. Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed are on tape, and those tapes say that they were acting on behalf of—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. It's from all sides from time to time.

In fairness to the questioner, I don't like interrupting, but I must when there's not enough to be heard. I apologize. Carry on.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker.

Just to recap, the evidence shows—the OPP has the evidence, Elections Ontario has the evidence—that Andrew Olivier was offered a bribe. The tapes show that both Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed say on tape that they were doing that on behalf of this Premier. But the Premier is denying all of that—she's denying all of it. So my question is very clear: Does she have any evidence at all about her version of the story, Speaker? What's her version?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've talked about my position many times in the House.

Again, I'm going to read into the record what the Chief Electoral Officer has said. These are the Chief Electoral Officer's words. It is the section of the Chief Electoral Officer's—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Nepean–Carleton, come to order—second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —report that is germane to the issue of whether there has been guilt determined or not. What he says is this: “I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges.”

That's why the investigation is not taking place in this House. The investigation is independent, it is unfolding and we need to let it do so, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, there are mountains upon mountains of evidence that Andrew Olivier was offered a job in order for him to step aside and clear the way for the hand-picked Liberal candidate so that the Premier would not have to appoint him. There are two taped phone calls. There are police interviews that say that no decision had been made about whether or not to appoint Glenn Thibeault. But the Premier claims that all of this evidence is wrong. So I just want to know, and the people of Ontario, I think, deserve to know, will she share her evidence with us?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I have said repeatedly in this House and outside of this House that I had decided that Glenn Thibeault was going to be our candidate. I had made that decision. I've said that over and over and over again.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Great choice.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and Food says it is a great choice—and it is a great choice. It was a great choice. Glenn Thibeault is a terrific representative for Sudbury. He's a strong, strong voice and advocate for Sudbury.

The issues that are confronting Sudbury and other parts of the north are very challenging ones, and we need to make sure that we are making very good decisions to make sure that there are good transportation networks, that there's good investment in infrastructure, that people in Sudbury, like people all over the province, have the prospect of a secure retirement. Those are the issues the member for Sudbury ran on. That's why he's sitting in this House on this side.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, this is the sixth time this Premier has been asked for any evidence to support her story, and the Premier has yet to provide one shred, one iota of evidence to back up her story. The Premier's version of events simply doesn't match any of the evidence that is currently on record. It doesn't match Gerry Loughheed's taped phone call, it doesn't match Pat Sorbara's taped phone call and it doesn't match what Andrew Olivier told the police.

So let's try it again: In front of all of the evidence that's been put on the record so far, does the Premier have any evidence to back up her version of events? Does she have any evidence to back up her story?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said a number of times today, Elections Ontario determined that the allegations against me and the member for Sudbury were baseless. We'll continue to work with the authorities, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to fully co-operate, as we have been doing.

The fact is, there are many, many issues confronting us. As I said to the member of the Conservative Party, the leader of the third party could, in one of her questions, be asking about the round table on murdered and missing aboriginal women that is taking place in Ottawa on Friday. I would have thought that that would be an issue that would be of great concern to the leader of the third party, especially given that her candidate in Sudbury was a First Nations member. I thought that maybe there would be at least one question about what kinds of actions we might expect to come out of that round table.

That's an important issue not just in Ontario, but across the country. I fully expect—

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

Interjections.

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

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, you have repeatedly said that on December 11, you had a conversation with Andrew Olivier and told him you were appointing Glenn Thibeault as your candidate in Sudbury. Pat Sorbara said she was in the room with you when you spoke on the phone to Mr. Olivier. Ms. Sorbara explicitly said she could hear your side of the conversation. But the next day, Ms. Sorbara told Mr. Olivier, "You've been directly asked by the Premier to make a decision to step aside."

Premier, if you had already told Mr. Olivier that you were appointing Mr. Thibeault, then why did Ms. Sorbara continue to ask Mr. Olivier to step aside? If it was a done deal, why the bribe?

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'll say what I have said repeatedly, which is that I had decided that Glenn Thibeault was going to be the candidate in Sudbury. I have made that very, very clear.

There is an investigation going on. That investigation is not taking place in this chamber. The investigation is independent. We need to let that investigation unfold.

I will continue to respond to the questions across the floor, but the fact is that the investigation is independent, and it is taking place outside of this chamber.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: You've dragged this chamber and all the members, I say to the Premier, into this mess because you won't restore integrity to your office. You're bringing us all down, and we don't appreciate it. You can say it's independent. True, the police investigation is—and possible charges in that process. But you got us all into this mess because you refuse to do the right thing. You're bringing the art of politics and the honour of politics down; that's why we're going to continue to ask you these questions.

Premier, you said that you told Mr. Olivier on December 11 that you were appointing the candidate. Then on the 12th, Ms. Sorbara said that you were still asking Mr. Olivier to step down. Premier, who's telling the truth about their conversation with Mr. Olivier?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just begin by saying, Mr. Speaker, that I have a deep respect for political office. I'm in politics because I believe that government can and must make a difference. I believe that elected officials have a responsibility to advance the causes that brought them into politics in the first place, to do everything that they can to improve the lot of people in their jurisdictions and across this province.

I wouldn't be standing here, I wouldn't be in politics and neither, I believe, would anyone in this House be here if they didn't believe that government could make a difference—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm going to ask the member from Leeds–Grenville and the Minister of the Environment to have a conversation, maybe, elsewhere.

Wrap up, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to say to the young people who are here for the model Parliament that I am so proud of them for taking part in this. I just want them to know that government can and must make a difference. It must make a positive difference, and it can.

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs will come to order.

New question.

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BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. I certainly hope your example is not one that the model Parliament is going to take away, because that's not the way this place should operate.

Let's get to the question: When Greg Sorbara's name appeared in an RCMP warrant, he resigned from cabinet. But when Pat Sorbara is facing down a criminal investigation, the Premier is keeping her on the job as one of her top aides. Why do different rules apply to Pat Sorbara than applied to Greg Sorbara, and when will you ask Pat Sorbara to step aside?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I made a statement on Friday and I was very clear in my position on this. The situation that the member opposite is referencing is a very different situation than the one we are dealing with here.

Let me just repeat: The investigation is not taking place in this House. The investigation is separate. I will continue to answer questions. I will continue to work with the authorities, as we all will.

At the same time, there is such important work to be done. I referenced the round table on Friday on missing and murdered aboriginal women. It is extremely important that provinces come together, that leadership across this country come together, and attempt to work with the federal government. Whether we can work with the federal government to get a national inquiry or, if that's not possible, to at least come together to agree on what some of the concrete actions might be to improve the lot of aboriginal girls and women in this province, that's a very important piece of work that I will be doing while the investigation—

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Again, to the Premier: Premier, I've been here for 25 years. In 25 years, we have seen members of cabinet from different governments—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I find the decorum unacceptable. When someone is trying to put a question, to mock somebody is not what I call appropriate.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Or anyone else trying to tell me how to do my job.

Please.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: In the last 25 years, members of every party have faced investigations for one thing or another. Some have been exonerated; some have not. But there's been a tradition that when you're under investigation, you do the right thing and you step aside so you're not acting as a government decision-maker. Why do these rules not apply to Pat Sorbara?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think the member opposite actually answered part of the question himself in

the sense that Pat Sorbara is not a sitting member of Parliament. He knows that full well.

I know the member fairly well. He knows that I take this seriously. He knows that I'm going to work with the authorities. He knows very well that the investigation is separate from what goes on in this chamber. There are many, many important issues that we need to be talking about. This is one that obviously is important and we will continue to discuss it, but the investigation is not taking place in this House. It's taking place independently outside of the Legislature.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. As all members of the House know, it is quite common for us to hear from constituents about drug funding in Ontario. We are often asked why some drugs are funded by the government and some are not. The question for many is a question that affects their very livelihoods every day. Ontarians need access to certain drugs so they can do the normal things that we take for granted, like go to work, take walks and visit new places in the province. It's important that our government get drug funding right so that constituents like mine in the great riding of Beaches–East York can live the best lives possible, and I know our government is committed to ensuring Ontarians have access to the best and safest treatments available.

I ask the minister if he would please explain the process of drug funding in Ontario.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Beaches–East York for the question.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Ontarians have access to the best and the safest drugs and treatments. That's why we took the politics out of those funding decisions; we did that several years ago. Now we rely on experts to determine which drugs are and should be funded. All drugs go through a review by an expert committee which undertakes a thorough evaluation based on the best available evidence.

In fact, in 2010 we introduced a process which now allows patient advocacy groups to make submissions, which are considered by the committee in evaluating a new drug therapy. Based on the committee's advice, the executive officer of the Ontario Public Drug Programs makes a funding decision based on the best interests of patients and the public.

This year our government will spend nearly \$5 billion on more than 3,800 drugs for Ontario patients.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Minister, for that review.

I was approached by Beaches–East York constituents Lorna Killam and Michael Beirne about a drug called Soliris that provides demonstrated improvements to health and quality of life for patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome, or aHUS. aHUS is a very rare and life-threatening disease. Their very close friend

Toni Vernon, who is in the House today, has aHUS and needs a life-saving kidney. My constituent Lorna is a match and will donate her kidney, but her doctor asks that Toni be on Soliris before he'll do the operation. Unfortunately, this medication is not currently available to the majority of aHUS patients in Ontario who depend on the government to fund this costly treatment.

In June 2013, Health Canada approved Soliris for use in Canada, but it's not listed. Minister, what is Ontario doing for Ontarians who suffer from aHUS to have access to Soliris?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As I was able to say earlier this morning in question period, I was informed earlier this week by the executive officer of Ontario's Public Drug Programs that Ontario will now provide Soliris to patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome, or aHUS, who meet the defined clinical criteria of the disease. The aHUS advocacy group was informed of this decision yesterday.

Yesterday we had one member of the PC Party questioning whether we should even be teaching evolution in schools. Now a member of the PC Party is suggesting that our decisions on drug funding need not be based on science. I can't even begin to imagine what may be coming next. Perhaps we never landed on the moon. Perhaps the world is flat after all.

We will continue to rely on evidence to make decisions about what drugs work and for what patients, and I'm happy to make this announcement today.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. The day after you spoke with Mr. Olivier, your deputy chief of staff called him and warned him over the phone that this wasn't about Olivier deciding to run; it was all about Andrew Olivier deciding to say no to the Premier. Of course, Sorbara is referring to him saying no to your request that he step aside. Ms. Sorbara made it clear on that tape that you, Premier, asked Olivier to step aside.

Premier, why do you continue to deny that you asked Mr. Olivier to step aside on December 11?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Once again, let me just say that I had made a decision that Glenn Thibeault was going to be our candidate in Sudbury.

There is an investigation ongoing. That investigation is not taking place in this House. It's an independent investigation that is taking place, and I will continue—we will all continue—to co-operate with it.

I thought, actually, with the Conference Board of Canada report coming out in the last couple of days, that the members opposite, particularly in the PC Party, might have been interested in talking about the economy. What's interesting is that all private sector economists are now forecasting continued growth for the Ontario economy. That's very, very good news. I know that the Minister of Finance is going to want to comment further on this.

The Conference Board of Canada's provincial outlook, winter 2015, says: "Ontario's economy is projected to grow by 2.9% this year, bolstered by strong exports and consumer spending." That's very good news.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Again to the Premier: The day after Mr. Olivier spoke to you, he spoke with your deputy chief of staff and told her: "I'm looking to seek that nomination." Yet you told us over and over again—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader, second time.

Mr. Bill Walker: —that there was going to be no nomination. He said, "And I appreciate the Premier's position." It simply doesn't make sense that Mr. Olivier appreciated your position and then told your deputy chief of staff he was still running if you said there wasn't going to be a nomination.

Premier, are you telling the truth when you say you told Mr. Olivier you were appointing a candidate on December 11?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: The court of public opinion ruled, and they chose Glenn Thibeault in Sudbury. They chose Glenn Thibeault because they recognized that we do have challenges before us and that we must continue to invest in skills and in training, invest in infrastructure, invest in maintaining a very dynamic and competitive business climate, and strengthen our retirement security, Mr. Speaker.

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They know that we have a lot of work to bring our path to balance, which is achieving its results ahead of targets. They know that we continue to look at our program reviews, that the President of the Treasury Board is doing a fine job, looking at matching our compensation as well, Mr. Speaker—revenue integrity to ensure that everyone pays their fair share—all along exceeding our targets, becoming the lowest-cost government anywhere in Canada and recognizing that we must stay together.

The people of Sudbury ruled on the issue that's before us in this House, recognizing all that was put forward, and they chose a great candidate, Glenn Thibeault.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed both have very similar stories. They both were caught on tape saying that they would like Andrew Olivier to step aside for Glenn Thibeault. In the course of that deliberation they would like to present Olivier with—and I quote Lougheed—"options in terms of appointments, jobs, whatever." This is the 26th time the Premier is being asked this question: Who gave Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed the directions to present these options to Andrew Olivier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I will say once again that I have answered these questions. The investigation is happening outside of this House. I've been

very clear that I take this matter very seriously. I will continue to work with the authorities.

But I thought, actually, that when the member opposite stood up he was going to be asking a question on auto insurance, because we're making progress on auto insurance. I know that the Minister of Finance is going to want to speak to that because I know it's of great concern to the member opposite. And it's just one of the issues that we have to be dealing with as we govern this province, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important that we give regular updates on things like the progress on the reduction of auto insurance premiums.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The question again is to the Premier. The question is really very simple, and instead of answering the question directly, the Premier has repeatedly not answered the question, deflected and referred to a scripted answer. The people of Ontario don't want scripted answers. They don't want speaking notes. They don't want talking points. They want a direct answer. So I'm going to ask the question one more time. This is the 26th time, and I'm hoping the Premier can answer this question directly, for once. Simple question: Who gave the orders to Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, I believe, took a law course; I think he's actually a lawyer. Recognizing that, he more than anyone recognizes the process. We are respecting the process and that's exactly what the Premier's doing.

But in regard to auto insurance, which I think he had a passion for, we know that we continue to do what's necessary to reduce auto rates. That's why we have a bill before the House. That's why we're fighting fraud. And, Mr. Speaker, for those who are watching, we have now over a dozen companies reducing their rates by more than 15%. We are on target to do what's necessary because of the actions that were taken. We want to do more, and I hope the member opposite will try to participate in that process as well.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Education.

Minister, as you know, today is Pink Shirt Day. Pink Shirt Day began in Nova Scotia after a grade 9 boy wore a pink shirt to school. He was mercilessly bullied by schoolmates for looking "gay."

Two thirds of kids who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered feel unsafe at school, and almost three quarters of kids report hearing homosexual slurs at schools every day.

Minister, bullying in our schools and in our society is a widespread problem and is unacceptable, often resulting in devastating emotional, psychological or physical harm on those who are targeted. I know this is an issue that all members in this House feel strongly about. Minister, can you please tell me and tell this House what the

government is doing to combat this deep-rooted and appalling problem?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Happy birthday to the member from Halton.

I'm absolutely thrilled to be able to speak about this issue because it's very important to me. The member is right. Two high school students, David Shepherd and Travis Price, didn't stand by while that grade 9 student was bullied for wearing pink. They went out and bought pink shirts too, and took a brave stand against bullying.

I'm proud to be a member of this Legislature which passed aggressive anti-bullying legislation. I'm also proud that our government recently introduced the revised health and physical education curriculum that brings forward current and relevant issues about bullying. This includes teaching our students about healthy, respectful relationships with their peers and that bullying, under any circumstance, is not okay.

I'm proud that we're all wearing pink today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I thank the Minister of Education for her response and for her thoughtful comments. Those two grade 12 boys went home that night and emailed their friends, and word spread. The next day, the entire school was outfitted in a sea of pink.

Interjection: Nice.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Yes.

These young men changed the culture at their school. In order to combat bullying in schools across this province, we need to change the culture in all of our schools. There have been too many tragic incidents of young people taking their own lives, in part because they could no longer endure the bullying from their peers at school.

I know that the Minister of Education agrees that this is completely unacceptable. We also know that in today's technologically driven world, bullying does not stop at the end of the day.

Minister, could you please inform this House on what your government is doing to combat bullying outside of the classroom?

Hon. Liz Sandals: The member is absolutely correct. As a government, we have taken action. Ontario took the lead and included cyberbullying as part of the definition of bullying and recognized cyberbullying in our Accepting Schools Act.

Our digital and interconnected world offers students endless positive possibilities. But at the same time, they need to be aware of the potential risks, which is why I am so proud that the recently revised health and physical education curriculum helps children and youth develop skills for online safety by learning about such things as safe and respectful use of technology; social, emotional and legal implications of online behaviour such as sexting; and the potential effects of sexting on relationships and future employment.

Our government has taken action. We've provided bullying-prevention training for up to 25,000 teachers and close to 7,500 principals and vice-principals. We are—

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim McDonell: My question is to the Premier. In recent months you questioned the integrity of the Auditor General and downplayed the OPP's statements in their ITO. You made allegations against your colleagues across the aisle. Everyone's integrity seems to be fair game for you.

But Premier, when somebody questions your integrity, your deputy stands in the chamber insulting the intelligence of the people of Ontario and painting a flowery picture of your decisions that the public no longer believes.

Premier, when will you demonstrate the integrity of your office and call for the resignation of Gerry Lougheed and Pat Sorbara?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, once again, I have said repeatedly that there's an investigation ongoing. We will continue to work with the authorities, but we need to let that investigation take place outside this House; it's an independent process. I've been very clear. I've answered these questions many, many times—I made a statement on Friday that is a public statement—but the investigation needs to unfold.

There are many, many things that are confronting us right now, and opportunities. I had the opportunity last Friday morning to attend the athletes' village for the Pan/Parapan American Games that are taking place this summer. It was a wonderful event. It was wonderful because it's an athletes' village, and it's going to be terrific for the 10,000 athletes and coaches who will be there for the Pan/Parapan Games, but there's also a legacy attached to it. I know that the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport is going to want to speak to that. It's a very important legacy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Again to the Premier: Your actions don't demonstrate the integrity your colleagues gush about. You continue to stand with your two Liberal operatives who have cast a dark shadow over the Sudbury election and our democracy.

We shouldn't have to remind you to do the right thing, but you seem to have lost your way once again. We launched a petition that thousands of Ontarians have already signed, and Premier, they're asking that you do the right thing by demanding the resignation of Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed Jr. until the allegations are resolved. Premier, will you stand up and finally come clean with the people of Ontario?

1130

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

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to acknowledge the member's question. As the member knows, the Premier has answered the question many times.

It gives me a great opportunity, I think, at this point to talk about the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games here in the province of Ontario. I just want to give members an update because we're five months away and I haven't had a question in quite some time—

Interjections.

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

Carry on.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been able to sell over 275,000 tickets so far. As the Premier mentioned, the athletes' village is completed. It was officially handed over to TO2015 by the contractors and Infrastructure Ontario. We have over 52,000 people who have signed up to volunteer.

Mr. Speaker, this is about building a legacy here in the province of Ontario for future generations of athletes and young people.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Premier. Last month, your deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, called Andrew Olivier, asking him to stop seeking the Liberal nomination, and in exchange, he was offered a job. Ms. Sorbara said—

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Oh, no, this is a good one: "You're like the third person I've even heard her ask this of." Who are the other people Ms. Sorbara was referring to?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said repeatedly, we will work with the authorities. I will continue to work with the authorities. There is an investigation going on, Mr. Speaker. But that investigation is not taking place in this House. That investigation is taking place elsewhere.

I made a decision that Glenn Thibeault was going to be the candidate in Sudbury. He is and will be a strong representative for Sudbury in his time here, and we're very, very pleased that he's with us.

The fact is, there is an investigation going on. I take it very seriously, but it's happening outside of this House.

Mr. Speaker, there are many things that we have to be doing at the same time that that investigation is taking place outside of this House, and one of those is investing in the infrastructure that we know is needed in places like Oshawa. It's incredibly important for the greater Toronto and Hamilton area that we make those investments in infrastructure, including transit, and that's exactly the work that's in front of us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Speaker, this is the third time that we've asked this question. But maybe the third time is the charm. It seems that the Premier doesn't feel the need to answer, but I'm going to try anyway.

Pat Sorbara told Andrew Olivier that the Premier has called two other people to push them out of the way. If you won't tell us who they are, then I'll ask instead: What were they offered in order to get out of the way?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I thank the member for that particular question.

As the Premier has said repeatedly in this place and elsewhere, that is an investigation. Those are discussions that are happening elsewhere.

Speaker, over the last few days, I have had the privilege to meet with a number of representatives at the OGRA/ROMA conference, including people from—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please.

I'm going to make a comment here—not exactly a ruling, but I'm going to make a comment that the tradition of this place is that the question put deserves attention by the answer.

Interjections.

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

I'm requesting that the answers come somewhat close to the question.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that the Premier has had the opportunity many times over the last number of days, as the opposition has been exclusively focused on one particular issue, unfortunately to the neglect of everything else that's important to this community—certainly the member representing the Durham—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean–Carleton, second time.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —region community should be very happy to know that we continue to proceed with the 407 East extension, for example, and that we continue to invest in GO Transit to her community along the Lakeshore East line, with more to come over the next decade.

I can tell that member that the chair of her region met with me the other day at ROMA/OGRA.

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

Hon. Steven Del Duca: He's very happy with the work we're doing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I need to correct my record—third time.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: What does that mean?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It means you're close.

New question.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is to the Minister of Research and Innovation. Investing in research excellence helps support economically important sectors and leads to important discoveries that bring tangible benefits to the people in my riding of Cambridge and all

Ontarians. Thanks in part to strategic investments made by our government, Ontario has emerged as the key global destination for neuroscience research.

Our province has some of the best-educated, hardest-working and most innovative brain researchers and scientists in the world. I understand that with our government's continued support, the Ontario Brain Institute is seamlessly connecting researchers, clinicians and industry to make critical discoveries and deliver innovative, patient-focused treatment. I welcome this, as I have provided nursing care to many of those who are suffering from brain-related issues.

Minister, can you inform the members of this House on how our government is building Ontario up as the global leader in brain research, commercialization and care?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Cambridge for that very good question.

The economic impact of brain and mental health disorders to our economy is \$39 billion a year. That's why investing in patient-focused health care innovation is a critical pillar of our government's economic growth plan.

Our government created the Ontario Brain Institute in 2005. This Premier, after becoming Premier of Ontario in 2013, allocated \$100 million to the Ontario Brain Institute. This funding will help the Ontario Brain Institute to raise \$205 million in additional investments from other sources.

The Ontario Brain Institute is providing strategic brain research and helping to raise Ontario's profile in the world as a leader in brain sciences.

Our government will continue to support leading-edge brain research that will help grow our economy, as well as create high-skilled jobs and improve patient care in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Minister, for the answer.

I understand that more than two million Ontarians will be affected by brain disorders in their lifetime and that one million Ontarians currently live with depression. As a nurse, I provided care to many constituents and their families in my riding suffering from conditions such as Alzheimer's, autism, depression and Parkinson's. While it's reassuring to know that Ontario has some of the best brain scientists in the world, our government must continue to support dynamic research to improve the treatment of these brain-related disorders.

I understand that you recently announced the latest research projects the Ontario Brain Institute is undertaking thanks in part to our government's investments. Minister, can you inform the members of the House on how these projects will help improve the lives of Ontarians and my constituents in Cambridge who are battling these conditions?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to again thank the member for that very good question.

My ministry is committed to supporting groundbreaking research to help improve the treatment of brain

disorders and diseases. Last month I was joined by my colleague Minister Sergio to announce \$56 million in investments and funding to the Ontario Brain Institute. This funding will support ground-breaking research to help improve treatment and diagnosis of brain diseases and disorders such as depression, Alzheimer's, autism and Parkinson's, and help to get treatment to patients much faster.

Our government will continue to build Ontario's reputation as the world leader in brain-related research, science and innovation.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier.

Premier, I can't help but notice the similarities between your gas plant scandal and your Sudbury scandal. They both centre on closely placed insiders and they both have deputy chiefs of staff involved to do the Liberals' bidding.

You shut down the gas plant scandal committee to protect your insiders in that OPP investigation, and you won't make the insiders in the Sudbury scandal step aside while the OPP investigation carries on. You've developed a culture of entitlement for insiders and a culture of fear for anyone who opposes you.

1140

Premier, why are you protecting the people who are suspects in a criminal investigation, unless the trail leads right back to you?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just respond to the first part of that question, which is to say that when I came into this office in 2013, I made it clear, and actually I had made it clear through my leadership bid, that we were going open up the process, that we were going to open up the process that the justice committee was involved in, that the scope of the questions that the justice committee would have access to would be broadened. That happened, Mr. Speaker. There were hundreds of thousands of documents and dozens of witnesses that went in front of that committee. I'm pleased that there has been a report that has been written.

As I did there, with the situation around the Sudbury by-election, I've been very clear. I've been clear in this House; I've been clear outside of this House exactly what I did. I made a decision that Glenn Thibeault was going to be our candidate.

There is now an investigation going on. That investigation is going on outside of this House. It is an independent investigation, and I believe we need to let it unfold.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, in your scandals, we learned that the Liberals continue to say one thing but later evidence reveals the truth. In the gas plant scandal we heard under oath, "I have no emails," but the OPP recovered those emails. With Sudbury we heard "No job offer was made," but the OPP turned over taped conversations outlining a job offer.

Premier, there is hard evidence—audiotape recordings—that the decision on your candidate in Sudbury had not been made by mid-December. Now, this is contradictory to what we've heard in this Legislature.

We both know that knowingly contradicting the truth shows contempt for every member of this Legislature. Premier, can you and will you provide this House and the OPP with even one email that corroborates your version of the story?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, when I say that the investigation is independent, that's not my opinion; that's a fact, Mr. Speaker. The Public Prosecution Service of Canada has been retained. It's a process that's happening outside of this House.

Now, I understand as well as the next person the back and forth of question period. But I believe that accusing people of being criminals when there is an investigation going on is wrong. I don't think that's right; I don't think it's fair. I think the honourable members opposite should stop doing that, and I think they should acknowledge that the investigation is happening outside this House and that we need to let it unfold.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. If the Premier has any evidence to support her version of the Sudbury bribery scandal, why won't she share it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, the investigation is not taking place in this House. It's not happening here; it's happening outside of this House. It's an independent investigation. It's really important that it be independent. I don't think there's anyone in Ontario who would want to believe that the politicians in this House would be directing that investigation. I think they believe that the authorities need to be allowed to do their work. So that's what I'm going to do, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to co-operate with the authorities, but I am going to let them do their work outside of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Is the reason that the Premier won't share any evidence to support her version of the Sudbury bribery scandal because there is none?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I have stated clearly my position. I've stated it here. I stated it on Friday in a very public statement that is available to anyone who wants to read it. I've said it over and over and over again.

There is an investigation going on. The authorities have a responsibility to undertake that investigation independent of this Legislature. We're going to let them do that, and I will continue to co-operate with them.

ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Ma question est pour la procureure générale. Madame la Procureure, je sais que vous et votre ministère avez annoncé une nouvelle stratégie pour la province en décembre dernier. Cette

stratégie semble être désignée afin de permettre un accès accru pour tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes au système de justice. C'est quelque chose qui est très important pour les résidents de ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Orléans et moi-même.

J'ai aussi remarqué que plusieurs parties prenantes de la communauté juridique appuient cette approche pour faire avancer le système de justice ontarien.

Est-ce que la procureure générale pourrait clarifier comment cette stratégie fera avancer le système de justice en Ontario?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Premièrement, je voudrais remercier la députée d'Ottawa-Orléans pour son intérêt dans l'avancement du système de justice en Ontario. Elle a raison de dire que notre stratégie est cruciale à l'avancement de notre système juridique.

L'amélioration de l'accès à la justice a toujours été une priorité clé pour mon ministère. Je prends cette priorité à coeur et mon ministère s'engage à créer un système plus simple, plus rapide et moins cher pour tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes. C'était d'ailleurs l'une des priorités dans ma lettre de mandat.

Je tiendrai donc une table ronde avec les partenaires clés du secteur de la justice ainsi que la communauté afin de discuter des enjeux auxquels ils font face. Nous travaillerons ensemble afin de surmonter ces obstacles et nous serons, avec nos partenaires, une force de changement positif.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci. Question?

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Je remercie la procureure générale pour sa réponse. C'est important pour les Ontariens et Ontariennes que ceci demeure une priorité pour notre gouvernement.

La communauté juridique de ma circonscription d'Ottawa-Orléans était très excitée lorsque cette stratégie a été annoncée. Je pense que cela intéresserait beaucoup mes commettants si la procureure générale pourrait élaborer sur certains points de cette stratégie afin d'illustrer de quelle manière celle-ci pourra assurer un accès approprié au système de justice.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Merci encore à la députée d'Ottawa-Orléans pour sa question. D'abord, nous veillerons à ce que les procédures judiciaires soient plus rapides et que le système de justice soit plus simple à naviguer.

Ensuite, nous permettrons aux participants à la justice familiale d'avoir un accès plus facile à la médiation et à d'autres formes de règlement extrajudiciaire des différends, et nous veillerons à ce qu'ils obtiennent plus facilement les services de soutien et les renseignements nécessaires.

Nous assurerons aussi un appui plus efficace aux personnes ayant des troubles de santé mentale qui entrent en contact avec le système de justice criminelle, y compris aux étapes de la mise en liberté sous caution et du prononcé de la peine.

De plus, il ne faut pas oublier que quoiqu'il ne fasse pas officiellement partie de cette stratégie, le projet pilote à Ottawa sur l'accès à la justice en français aidera aussi

les justiciables francophones à avoir un meilleur accès à la justice dans leur langue.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glangarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker. According to standing order 37(e), "A minister to whom an oral question is directed may refer the question to another minister who is responsible for the subject matter to which the question relates."

My question to the Premier related to the ongoing investigation into the Sudbury by-election and in no way referenced the Ministry of—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've got enough of the gist of your point of order. I've dealt with that, as you heard me in the House deal with that. Subsequent to that, I would remind all people asking the questions, and in particular the ministers answering the questions, that even when you refer the question to someone else, it should be answering the question.

MEMBERS' PHOTO

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): This is a reminder for all members, as a result of this morning's failed unanimous consent, that we've all agreed that we would meet on the grand staircase for a photo for those who can make the time to do so, for Pink Shirt Day.

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

The House recessed from 1149 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, my father used to say that the next generation is always an improvement on the one that came before. As living proof, in the east gallery today, the newest addition to our family, Vaughan Edward Starr, is here with his parents, Kirsten and Danny. I welcome them to Queen's Park.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm very pleased to introduce my three guests in the east gallery: Dr. Dhun Noria from the Scarborough Hospital; Farokh Noria, her husband; and my good friend Valerie Mah, who is a retired TDSB principal but is now heading the foundation for the Toronto Educational Opportunity Fund. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: They're just coming in now, but I'd like to welcome to the House Rebecca and Richard Heessels. They're from my riding, and their little son has aHUS. They're here today advocating for permanent funding for Soliris.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is my pleasure to welcome to the Legislature today Jessica John, who is from Belle River, and her two sons, Luca Buiza and Julian Buiza,

who are here to listen to the introduction of a petition that Jessica organized in our community.

It also happens to be Luca's fifth birthday today. What a wonderful day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): He actually told me he was going to grow a moustache to celebrate.

Further introductions? The member from Davenport.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure today to introduce two very special guests visiting here from Covenant House in Toronto: Julie Neubauer, transitional housing manager, and Erin Boudreau, assistant communications manager. Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WIND FARMS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, I am troubled to inform the House that two wind farm projects have been proposed for Merrick and Mattawan townships, in my riding of Nipissing.

We already know that industrial wind turbines have failed in Ontario. Wind power is simply unreliable, made mostly at night when we don't need the power. This creates a surplus that Ontario then has to get rid of by paying Quebec and the United States to take that power. According to the Auditor General, this has cost Ontario around \$2.6 billion more than the revenue we've received exporting that power between 2006 and 2013.

In Nipissing, not only have local First Nations, property owners and aviation and aerospace industry stakeholders voiced their concern about these wind farm installations, but the city of North Bay announced their strong opposition to the wind farm proposal north of the city, due to its proximity to Jack Garland Airport.

Speaker, enough. This government needs to reverse course, cancel the feed-in tariff subsidies, implement an immediate moratorium on wind power development and give municipalities veto authority over wind projects in their communities.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm using my statement today to bring awareness and attention to what is an ongoing labour dispute between Crown Holdings and their employees, who are members of the United Steelworkers.

Crown Holdings forced its 120 Toronto factory workers out on strike in September 2013 after they demanded up to a 42% cut in pay and compensation from Crown Holdings employees. Speaker, they've been on strike for 17 months. For 17 months in this province they've stood to fight for fairness and justice in the workplace, fight for equality and fair compensation from a multinational that has made record profits, that has a very productive facility.

Not only have they done that, but I want to bring attention to a really tragic and unfortunate turn of events

and maybe a twist of fate that saw these Crown Holdings workers take it upon themselves to go and try to find little Elijah Marsh. They had heard that there was a baby who was lost. While they were on the picket line at 4:30 in the morning, they left the picket site. They went and, unfortunately, one of the strikers, David Elines, was one of the people who found Elijah Marsh.

Their job is done, Speaker. They have fulfilled their obligation to fight for their fellow workers and they have also fulfilled an obligation for citizens of this province. I call on the Minister of Labour to understand what is happening there, to pay attention to it and to intervene to end this strike. It's unnecessary.

CIVIC AWARDS

PRIX CIVIQUES

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I'm proud today to recognize two individuals and one organization from my community of Ottawa-Orléans for promoting the French language and francophone culture.

Le 3 février dernier, Sylvie Lamoureux fut décorée de la plus haute distinction décernée par la province, l'Ordre de l'Ontario, en reconnaissance de son excellence et de sa réussite dans le secteur de l'éducation postsecondaire en français. Professeure à l'Institut des langues officielles et du bilinguisme de l'Université d'Ottawa, elle s'est particulièrement démarquée par sa recherche portant sur le vécu postsecondaire des étudiants francophones.

Le 12 février, Nicole Fortier fut reconnue pour ses 35 ans d'engagement à la francophonie ontarienne en se voyant décerner le Prix Bernard-Grandmaître par l'ACFO Ottawa lors de leur gala annuel. Elle s'est distinguée par son dévouement, son implication au sein d'organismes et sa persévérance à l'avancement et à l'épanouissement de la francophonie.

Enfin, la Société franco-ontarienne du patrimoine et de l'histoire d'Orléans recevait, le 16 février dernier, le Prix Roger-Bernard. Leur présidente, Nicole Fortier, et leur vice-président, Louis Patry, ont accepté le prix au nom de l'organisme pour sa contribution à la préservation et à la mise en valeur d'éléments du patrimoine de l'Ontario français.

Congratulations again to these three amazing individuals. You have made our community very proud.

VETERANS

Mr. Bill Walker: Seven decades ago, Alf Meyer, Art Haley and Ray Campbell helped liberate France in the Second World War. Seventy years since joining the thousands of brave men and women who stormed the beaches of Normandy on D-Day, the veterans were honoured by the French government for their courageous efforts.

I'm honoured to rise in the House today to recognize Mr. Meyer, Mr. Haley and Mr. Campbell, all constituents of my great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, for

receiving the highest decoration the French government can give: knights of the French National Order of the Legion of Honour.

The French people will never forget the bravery Mr. Campbell, Mr. Meyer, Mr. Haley and other Canadians showed during the war. These men now officially join the knighthood rank of the First World War flying ace Billy Bishop, who was another native of my great riding and a recipient of this order.

There were 390 Canadian D-Day veterans on whom the government of France bestowed this award on the 70th anniversary of D-Day. In the words of the ambassador of France to Canada, Philippe Zeller, all these gentlemen “can proudly wear this insignia, which attests to their courage and their devotion to the ideals of liberty and peace.”

The French order was established by Napoleon Bonaparte more than 200 years ago and is the highest order of merit, much like our own Order of Canada. The order continues today and it also serves as a reminder of the friendship between Canada and France.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the House to join me in expressing our respect, admiration and pride in our peacekeepers and soldiers and knights for their heroic deeds.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, the city of Hamilton is suffering a housing crisis. Nearly 6,000 families are on a waiting list for subsidized housing. One in five renter households spend more than half their income on rent. They have little left over for their food and bills.

The investment in an affordable housing program—which this government praises to the skies—will support just 100 new units over the next 10 years, less than 3% of the need just to meet the population growth.

Thanks to downloading, over the next 20 years, Hamilton needs more than \$400 million just to maintain the social housing we have. People who are homeless and living in unstable housing are at high risk of physical and mental health problems. They have a hard time accessing health care. They experience hunger and unemployment. They are more likely to be victims of assault.

1510

Investing in housing is the right thing to do. It is the fiscally responsible thing to do. It is cheaper to provide people with safe and adequate housing than to manage homelessness with shelters and services.

Hamilton is paying more than its share for affordable housing and homelessness prevention programs. In 2013, Hamilton taxpayers paid 52% of the cost out of the property tax levy; Ontario paid a mere 21%. Even the federal government paid more. It’s time for this government to honour its moral obligations to the city of Hamilton and my constituents who need help.

PAT ROSEBRUGH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It’s my great pleasure to rise today to recognize a remarkable woman in my riding

of Cambridge. Pat Rosebrugh is being presented with the Lieutenant Governor’s Ontario Heritage Award for Lifetime Achievement this Friday. I could not be more proud. Pat is my mentor, my friend and a passionate heritage advocate who deserves such an honour.

Pat has been a leader in local heritage conservation since the 1960s. Inspired to take action after seeing a local landmark at risk of demolition, Pat organized the community to conserve one of the oldest public buildings in Ontario, thus beginning her lifelong commitment to heritage conservation.

What began as a few concerned individuals grew to become a visionary organization of volunteers in ACO Cambridge, championing the preservation of the rich stock of built and natural heritage in Cambridge. She played a critical role in raising awareness of the value of Cambridge’s cultural heritage resources. She continues to inspire and challenge others to take a more active role in the preservation of our historic buildings and cultural landscapes.

Pat has been recognized with an Award of Excellence by the Waterloo Region Heritage Foundation, and was inducted into the Cambridge Hall of Fame in 2014 and the Waterloo Region Hall of Fame, as part of Heritage Cambridge, in 2014.

Congratulations, Pat, on your lifetime achievement award.

PESTICIDES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Over the last few months, I’ve spoken with farmers and agricultural associations throughout Perth–Wellington. Many are very upset about this government’s plan to ban the use of neonicotinoid pesticides. They’ve moved ahead with no consultation and no thought for what this will mean to farmers. It’s as if farmers were not even an afterthought for them.

Farmers are the best stewards of our land. They are committed to protecting the environment that they live and work in. People tell me they supported the investigation into the effects of neonics because they want to be using the most environmentally sound practices on their land. However, what we are seeing now are policy decisions being made without the scientific evidence to back them up.

Farmers need to control insect pests to maintain their crops. Speaker, I have farmed, and let me tell you, we do not want to be going back to the pesticides that have been used in the past. I must support the agriculture industry in its call for this government to talk with agricultural stakeholders and the pollinator task force to come up with solutions that protect pollinators and the environment. The best way to protect our environment is to make policy based on science, not political science.

COVENANT HOUSE TORONTO

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise today to bring awareness and celebration to Covenant House Toronto, as

February is Covenant House Awareness Month. Covenant House Toronto, which is part of an internationally recognized child care network, has offered opportunity and hope to over 90,000 homeless young people for more than 30 years.

While most of these youth have experienced abuse, neglect, loss and hardship, their needs when they come to Covenant House can be extremely diverse. These young people are often in need of stability, guidance and opportunity to heal and feel ready to take on the future.

Much more than a shelter, Covenant House offers about 3,000 kids annually the widest range of life-changing services under one roof, including transitional housing onsite and in the community, education, counselling, health care, employment assistance, job training and aftercare.

To do all this, the agency relies on donors for about 80% of its annual budget. The agency specifically chose February for its campaign as it's traditionally the coldest winter month and when kids most need a safe refuge. It also marks the anniversary of Covenant House Toronto's opening in 1982.

Covenant House Toronto's second annual Covenant House month this February aims to raise awareness and funds to help homeless youth. I, along with the rest of my riding, am extremely proud of the hard work, dedication and advocacy of Covenant House Toronto. I stand today inviting all Ontarians to celebrate Covenant House Awareness Month.

DHUN NORIA

Ms. Soo Wong: I rise today to recognize my good friend Dr. Dhun Noria, who was recently awarded the province's highest honour, the Order of Ontario. Dr. Noria received this prestigious honour for her unwavering commitment and steadfast dedication to Scarborough Hospital—where she's the chief of laboratory medicine—the Ontario medical community and Scarborough itself.

Her work in the community is a source of inspiration. Dr. Noria serves on the Toronto Police Services Board, has been a member of the board of governors for Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care since 1996, and was a former chair of the Metro Toronto District Health Council.

For over 30 years, Dr. Noria has done an outstanding job to support this diverse urban community called the Scarborough Hospital. As a two-time survivor of breast cancer, she knows Ontario's health care system first-hand. Not even a diagnosis of cancer could slow her down.

Dr. Noria's remarkable commitment in the community has been recognized by a number of organizations. In 2014, she received a lifetime achievement award from the Scarborough Hospital Foundation. Dr. Noria also received the Ontario Medical Association's president's award for outstanding services by a physician to the community and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee award. She

was inducted into the Scarborough Walk of Fame in 2011 and has been named as a local Toronto hero by the Canadian Multicultural Council.

I'd like to thank Dr. Noria for everything she's done for the Scarborough Hospital, for the medical community and for Ontario.

MOTIONS

APPOINTMENT OF INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Hon. James J. Bradley: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to move motions without notice or debate respecting appointments of the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Financial Accountability Officer.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: First, I move that an humble address be presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

“We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, request the appointment of Brian Beamish as the Information and Privacy Commissioner for a term of five years, commencing on March 2, 2015, as provided in section 4 of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, RSO 1990, c. F. 31.”

And that the address be engrossed and presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council by the Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley moves that an humble address be presented—do we ask for dispense? Agreed? Dispense.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

APPOINTMENT OF FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICER

Hon. James J. Bradley: I move that an humble address be presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council as follows:

“We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of the province of Ontario, now assembled, request the appointment of Stephen LeClair as the Financial Accountability Officer for a term of five years, commencing on March 2, 2015, as provided in section 2 of the Financial Accountability Officer Act, 2013, SO 2013, c. 4.”

And that the address be engrossed and presented to the Lieutenant Governor in Council by the Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Moved by Mr. Bradley. Do we have a dispense request? Agreed? Dispense. Do we have agreement of the House? Agreed? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm proud to stand in the House today, on behalf of Ontario's two million students, to acknowledge Pink Shirt Day. We know that a safe, inclusive and accepting school environment is essential for students to succeed in the classroom and beyond, and it is the responsibility of everyone in our schools and local communities to promote respectful and caring relationships that support the cognitive, emotional, social and physical development of our children and students.

That is why today thousands of students and educators across Ontario and across Canada will be recognizing Pink Shirt Day. Pink Shirt Day was inspired in 2007 by two high school students from Nova Scotia, David Shepherd and Travis Price. When they discovered that a male classmate was bullied for wearing a pink shirt to school, they decided to take action. They went to a nearby store and bought pink shirts to give out to students, and they reached out to their fellow students to get them on board. The next day, many students were wearing the purchased shirts, and hundreds wore their own pink clothing. When the teen who was being bullied arrived at school, he was overwhelmed by the show of support.

Now, Pink Shirt Day has become an annual event to speak out against bullying in schools, communities and workplaces. Our government has led the way by developing strong legislation such as the Accepting Schools Act, and resources for school boards to address bullying and victimization through prevention, intervention and supports.

The Accepting Schools Act, which passed in 2012, was the first legislation of its kind in Canada. This important legislation is helping to make every school in Ontario a safe, inclusive and accepting place to learn, while at the same time ensuring that every student has the support to reach their full potential.

On Monday, our government took further steps toward ending bullying by releasing the revised, up-to-date health and phys-ed curriculum. We need to update our curriculum so that students understand the importance of things like healthy, respectful relationships, having the confidence to say "no," safe use of technology and the Internet to help eliminate cyberbullying, developing inclusive communities, and mental health.

As Ontarians, we must all work together.

Many schools and school communities are already demonstrating leadership in fostering and maintaining positive school climates through whole-school approaches that engage all members of the school community. I want to thank our educators, students and school communities for their leadership and commitment

in creating safe, inclusive and accepting school environments that are essential for student achievement and well-being.

This is also fundamental for our renewed vision for education. Our vision will help prepare our students to achieve excellence for a productive and successful future. But students can't properly focus on their future if they are afraid to go to school. We know that bullying and intimidation have an immediate negative impact on student well-being and their ability to succeed in school.

That is why, Speaker, Pink Shirt Day is so important. It's an opportunity to remind us all that everyone has a part to play in creating a positive school climate and in fostering healthy and respectful relationships. Those efforts must not be limited to a single day, but instead woven into day-to-day practices and embedded in the culture of the school.

I encourage every member in the House today to recognize Pink Shirt Day and to continue to promote the well-being of our students, so that everyone feels respected, accepted and valued. Today, let's use this opportunity to come together, to make a difference in the lives of Ontario's children, students and families.

REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to stand in the House today and tell you that this Saturday coming up, February 28, is the annual International Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day. A lot of people will ask what that is or will say, "We didn't know that we had an awareness day." But I can tell you from the people I've spoken to, Speaker, anybody who has had a repetitive strain injury will tell you very, very clearly why we need this day.

The goal of this day is to raise awareness of the debilitating nature of repetitive strain injuries and ways we can all prevent them.

Each year we mark Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day to promote the avoidance of such injuries, which, while they may not be life-threatening, can certainly be painfully life-altering.

At the Ministry of Labour, and throughout Ontario's health and safety system, we use a broader term: musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs for short. This term describes the injuries and disorders of the musculoskeletal system that can be caused or aggravated by not only repetitive work but also by forceful exertions, fixed or awkward postures, vibration and other physical causes.

Regardless of what we call these injuries, preventing them is always better than trying to cure them after the fact. These injuries take a tremendous toll on our workforce. They account for more than 40% of all lost-time injuries that are allowed by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.

If you look beyond the pain, the suffering, the social, emotional and economic costs to affected individuals, you'll also see there are economic costs to MSDs to all of us, estimated at more than \$26 billion annually. I think

we can do better than this. These injuries, for the most part, are entirely preventable. Ontario workers and employers have numerous resources to help protect against these often painful MSDs. These resources can be found through my ministry, through the WSIB, through all our health and safety partners across this province and the many other sources that are interested in workers' health and safety in Ontario.

Year-round, the Ministry of Labour and its partners continue to enforce workplace legislation, to raise awareness of hazards in the workplace, to train workplace parties, and we also research the issue of MSDs and how we can further prevent them. Now, when we go and do a workplace visit, the ministry's occupational health and safety inspectors focus on a number of things: They look at ensuring that those workplaces have a functioning internal responsibility system; they identify the hazards in the workplace, and that includes MSD hazards; as well, they ensure compliance with our existing health and safety legislation.

Ministry of Labour occupational health and safety inspectors also receive training in MSD hazard recognition. All employers in the province of Ontario are responsible under the Occupational Health and Safety Act for taking every precaution that's reasonable under the circumstances to protect the health and the safety of their workers. This includes protection from workplace hazards that can lead to these disorders. Ministry inspectors and ergonomists issue orders under the act and the regulations that accompany that act. They require employers to implement measures addressing MSD hazards for ergonomic assessments and related preventive measures, complete ergonomic assessments in the workplace, and provide worker training to prevent MSDs.

The government is committed to reducing MSDs right here in the province of Ontario. We know there remains much more to do. We must continue to create that positive change in a collaborative way, in co-operation with both the workers and the employers in this province. We must continue to promote a culture of prevention in the province. I'm convinced that if we all work together we can achieve that goal we all want; that being safer, healthier workplaces right throughout the province of Ontario.

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

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of the PC caucus to add my comments regarding Pink Shirt Day. Bullying is, without a doubt, a serious issue that continues to plague our society and, quite frankly, has been amplified by anonymous social media activities.

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Pink Shirt Day is a public and symbolic symbol of everyone coming together to fight for a common cause: putting an end to bullying. I'm proud that Ellwood Memorial Public School, in my riding of Dufferin-

Caledon, has chosen to designate the last Thursday of every month as Pink Thursdays, in which students wear a pink shirt to support anti-bullying campaigns.

But it has gone much beyond schools, to politicians, businesses, police and firefighters. Orangeville Police Service's Chief Wayne Kalinski and Constable Scott Davis are participating today by wearing a pink uniform, all because, in 2007, two young men in Nova Scotia said, "Enough is enough. Bullying must stop."

REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'm responding on behalf of the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

It's my honour to rise today in this Legislature to recognize Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day. Repetitive strain injuries begin as minor injuries but often lead to far more serious chronic pain. Thankfully, these injuries are now recognized and protected by the WSIB and codified within our laws.

I am proud that we, as a society and as legislators, have recognized the seriousness of this issue. We know that it happens in many, many jobs. We all have done a good job at raising awareness of the pain these injuries can lead to and, as a result, have greatly mitigated these injuries in the workplace.

I hope we can continue to raise awareness about these injuries. Every bit we do can help stop these highly preventable injuries.

ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVES

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Along with my colleagues, I stand to acknowledge today's recognition of Pink Shirt Day. As the Minister of Education noted in her remarks, it was students standing up for a classmate in Nova Scotia that made this a day for human rights, a day to oppose transphobia and homophobia.

Many students have fought over the decades for safe, secure and bigotry-free schools. Trans and gay students have taken risks, taken a lead and made a difference. However, it's very clear that this is a battle, a change that has not yet been fully won. It means there's much more for society as a whole to do and for individual schools and educators to do.

I have to say that in my riding of Toronto-Danforth, Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto runs the Triangle Program, a high school for LGBTQ youth that has been a refuge for many who have had more difficulty in their schools than they could handle in that school. I appreciate the fact that it has been supported by the province of Ontario. I appreciate the fact that the church itself has taken a leadership role in making sure that the facilities are there, that the doors are open and that students who come there feel that sense of security, safety and belonging that, unfortunately, all too often, they don't feel in other places.

It's incumbent on us, on a day like today, to remind everyone in this society that this kind of bigotry is

unacceptable, and to say that teaching in our schools that people have different gender identities and different gender orientations, and that that is entirely a part of our human nature—it's important for us to do that and move it forward through this society.

Again, today we should acknowledge those who stood up years ago on this day to make a difference, and acknowledge and recognize everyone who today is standing up, taking risks and making a difference.

REPETITIVE STRAIN INJURY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure to rise to recognize Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day. It has been 16 years since Ontario first recognized Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day. In Ontario, approximately 40% of all lost-time injury claims at the WSIB are as a result of repetitive strain injuries or musculoskeletal disease, and we still certainly have a way to go.

I want to give members of the Legislature a little bit of a preview, a window, into a day in the life of somebody who has a repetitive strain injury. I want to share with you parts of a letter sent to me from Catherine Fenech, who is the founder of the International Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day.

Catherine says, "An injury stays with you 24/7. It doesn't end when work is over. A typical day can easily get derailed by pain and/or depression that makes it difficult to accomplish anything."

She says she usually doesn't get up until mid-morning. She struggles all night to sleep. When she finally drags herself out of bed, she's groggy from not having slept, and stiff all day.

These days, she says, she hopes it doesn't snow, because she struggles with shovelling. She can't afford to pay for help, so she usually just struggles to get the minimum done and pays the price in pain later.

She says her house is a mess. She can't keep up with projects that are undone.

"WSIB was a nightmare to deal with, and the system has gotten worse." It took five years for them to recognize her injury. She doesn't know if she can deal with the stress of continuing to pursue WSIB again for very little benefits, and there's always the downside risk that they'll take away more benefits.

She would love to go back to work, but they won't provide a proper ergonomic environment for her to work in. Psychologically, she is a mess. She can't deal with the battles she continues to have with WSIB and her employers to accommodate her injury. The stress of having no money, chronic pain, sleeplessness and having to fight for what is right has left her unable to concentrate and focus. She struggles each and every day.

Speaker, this is emblematic—symptomatic—of a failure of this government to actually do anything when it comes specifically to repetitive strain injury—something that's all too common in our workplaces—but more broadly, injured workers in general, when they have to deal with the WSIB.

It's all good to dedicate a day, and I'm sure we all understand the challenges that people face with workplace injuries. But, my goodness, let's do something, put our efforts forward, ensure that WSIB actually functions as it should and was designed: to compensate workers when they are injured on the job; not to ostracize them and not to marginalize them, but to actually help them get back to work in a proactive way, to support them and their families, so that they can be functional members of society.

The system is broken. The Liberals have destroyed it over the past decade. It's not getting any better. If you don't do anything soon, you're going to have an RSI day every day, because the front lawn of the Legislature will be jam-packed with injured workers who are demanding justice.

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

It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm standing here today to present a petition on behalf of a family that is here advocating today for permanent funding of Soliris. It reads like this:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Soliris for patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome (aHUS), an ultra-rare, chronic and life-threatening genetic condition that progressively damages vital organs, leading to heart attack, stroke and kidney failure; and

"Whereas Soliris, the first and only pharmaceutical treatment in Canada for the treatment of aHUS, has allowed patients to discontinue plasma and dialysis therapies, and has been shown to improve kidney function and enable successful kidney transplant; and

"Whereas the lack of public funding for Soliris is especially burdensome on the families of Ontario children and adults battling this catastrophic disease;

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

"Instruct the Ontario government to immediately provide Soliris as a choice to patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding."

I agree with this petition. I'll affix my name and send it to the desk with Morgan.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It is my honour to introduce this petition today, which has been organized by our guests who are here today, Jessica John and her colleague Heather MacDonald-Ellis, who have done an incredible

job in raising awareness about the need for a national and provincial automotive strategy.

This petition reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the community of Windsor–Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

“Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spin-off jobs) for our community; and

“Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

“Whereas the inability of Ford and the Ontario to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

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

“To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector.”

I couldn't agree more. I will affix my name to this petition and send it to the Clerks' table with page Victoria.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise to bring a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Soliris for patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome (aHUS), an ultra-rare, chronic and life-threatening genetic condition that progressively damages vital organs, leading to heart attack, stroke and kidney failure; and

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“Whereas Soliris, the first and only pharmaceutical treatment in Canada for the treatment of aHUS, has allowed patients to discontinue plasma and dialysis therapies, and has been shown to improve kidney function and enable successful kidney transplant; and

“Whereas the lack of public funding for Soliris is especially burdensome on the families of Ontario children and adults battling this catastrophic disease;

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

“Instruct the Ontario government to immediately provide Soliris as a choice to patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding.”

I believe the minister already talked about this thing today. I support the petition and I give it to Madison.

TRESPASSING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas when private property is damaged it is left to property owners to repair these damages, and the costs can quickly add up to thousands of dollars. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has asked for a minimum fine for trespassing and an increase to the maximum limit on compensation for damages;

“Whereas Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, will amend the current Trespass to Property Act by creating a minimum fine of \$500 for trespassing and increasing the maximum compensation for damages to \$25,000; and

“Whereas the Respecting Private Property Act will allow property owners to be fairly compensated for destruction to their property, and will also send a message that trespassing is a serious issue by creating a minimum fine;

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

“To support Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, and schedule public hearings so that Bill 36 can be passed without further delay.”

For obvious reasons, I support this petition. I'm pleased to affix my name to it and give it to page Inaya.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Of course, I'm pleased to stand in the Legislature on behalf of the people from Oshawa who have a vested interest in the automotive industry, so I'm pleased to read this petition.

“Whereas the community of Windsor–Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

“Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spin-off jobs) for our community; and

“Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

“Whereas the inability of Ford and the Ontario to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

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

“To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector.”

I am pleased to affix my name to this, and I will send it to the table with page Riley.

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, I have a petition here.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

“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;

“Whereas customers expect that when they leave a tip or gratuity that the benefit will be going to the employees who directly contributed to their 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 use the tips and gratuities to pad their margins;

“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 Legislative Assembly of Ontario 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.”

Speaker, I’ll send this to the table with Muntder.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have petitions received from Northern Import Towing in Huntsville, Ontario, in support of the “Move Over” legislation.

The petition reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Highway Traffic Act requires drivers of a motor vehicle to slow down upon approaching an emergency vehicle that is stopped on the same side of a highway as that on which the driver is travelling; and

“Whereas over 40 states in the United States and five provinces in Canada have included roadside assistance workers in ‘Slow Down, Move Over’ legislation, providing protection for tow trucks assisting motorists; and

“Whereas everyone deserves a safe place to work;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to safety precautions to take when approaching roadside assistance vehicles.”

Mr. Speaker, I support this petition and will sign it.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It’s my pleasure to introduce this petition to the Legislature of Ontario.

“Whereas the community of Windsor–Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada

resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

“Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spin-off jobs) for our community; and

“Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

“Whereas the inability of Ford and the Ontario to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

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

“To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector.”

As the member from Windsor West, who proudly brags about our great automotive sector, I will sign this and give it to page Hannah.

DISTRACTED DRIVING

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed 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 fully support it, Mr. Speaker, and I give my petition to Niko.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

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

“Whereas the Chief Electoral Officer, Greg Essensa, has completed his investigation in Patricia Sorbara and Gerry Loughheed’s actions prior to the Sudbury by-election; and

“Whereas Mr. Essensa’s investigation concluded that he is ‘of the opinion that the actions of Gerry Loughheed Jr. and Patricia Sorbara amount to apparent

contraventions of subsection 96.1(e) of the Election Act'; and

"Whereas 'no Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario has ever conducted a regulatory investigation into allegations of bribery'; and

"Whereas no Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario has ever reported an apparent contravention of the home statutes of their office to the Attorney General; and

"Whereas the actions of the staff in Office of the Premier and Liberal insiders have brought dishonour to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario;

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

"To request Premier Wynne demand the temporary resignation of Patricia Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed Jr. until the allegations are resolved."

I hope they treat this better than they did this morning's question. I will pass it off to Natalie.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Wayne Gates: I would like to add a petition.

"Whereas the community of Windsor–Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

"Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spin-off jobs) for our community; and
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"Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

"Whereas the inability of Ford and the Ontario to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

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

"To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector."

I wholeheartedly agree with this, and I will give it to page Dhairya.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I support the petition. I'll give my petition to page Victoria.

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN

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

"Whereas the Ontario government's proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan (ORPP) is a mandatory pension plan which would target small businesses and their employees; and

"Whereas there has been little to no discussion on what the costs would be, or who would pay them; and

"Whereas affected businesses would be hit with up to \$1,643 per employee, per year in new payroll taxes starting in 2017; and

"Whereas affected employees would have up to \$1,643 per year extra deducted from their paycheques, and it would take 40 years for them to see the full pension benefits; and

"Whereas the Canadian Federation of Independent Business predicts the unemployment rate in Ontario would rise by 0.5%, and there would be a reduction in wages over the longer term; and

"Whereas all of these costs would be shouldered exclusively by small businesses and their employees; and

"Whereas public sector and big business employees who already have a pension plan will not be asked to pay into the plan;

"We, the undersigned, do not support implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and petition the government of Ontario to axe the pension tax."

I agree with this. I will sign my name to it and give it to page Julie.

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 24, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan / Projet de loi 56, Loi

exigeant l'établissement du Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: The ORPP is marketed as a mandatory tool to make Ontarians save for their retirement. Savings are what taxpayers have after paying taxes, utilities, rent or mortgages, insurance and food for their families. Premier Wynne's policies have driven up the costs of all of these essential components of a family's budget, eroding our disposable income and thus preventing Ontarians from being able to save.

Taxes: Well, they've doubled. The debt's up, and there's no plan to tackle the huge rising cost of servicing the debt.

Utilities: They're up, too. Hydro has more than doubled since the government took over and is forecast to go up another 68% in the next 20 years because of the Green Energy Act.

Rent: It has increased because of utilities and massive cuts to municipal transfers. My riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry alone has seen close to a million-dollar cut in OMPF funding.

Insurance: Ontario pays the highest rates for car insurance, especially in the GTA. This is strangling our economic hub.

Food: Wynne's new proposed carbon tax will drive up the cost of producing, transporting and packaging the food we buy, and will hit the most vulnerable disproportionately.

When the Liberals take money out of Ontarians' pockets, they deprive Ontarians of the ability to invest their savings into their chosen retirement options, which include RRSPs and tax-free savings accounts.

When polled, most Ontarians say that they would like to save more for retirement. Premier Wynne is of the opinion that she can just force them to and the savings will happen. This is both patronizing and arrogant. Pension contributions and other retirement savings tools serve two purposes: to ensure an income during old age and to shield current and medium-term income from taxation.

By contributing to our RRSP, we usually forego the enjoyment of a higher income that would be taxed at a higher bracket, to have it returned to us later, taxed at a lower rate. With a TFSA the argument is simple: to shield from the tax man capital gains made from our savings.

In 2013, the last taxation year available, Ontario's total employed workforce numbered approximately 7.3 million, according to Stats Canada. During the same taxation year, 2.2 million contributed to an RRSP, less than one third, despite the tax incentives of doing so. The ORPP would not offer workers or the province added value, because it would not complement the benefits of RRSP, CPP and TFSA contributions; it would only substitute voluntary and personally managed retirement savings with a mandatory and unaccountable program that will not pay a cent for decades.

Moreover, the ORPP would substitute itself for federal income security programs—that is, Old Age Security and the guaranteed income supplement—since its payouts would be clawed back from those programs. Forty years from now, retired Ontarians are likely to find themselves poorer overall by having been deprived of some of the necessities and/or perks their lost income would have provided.

Premier Wynne complains that Ontarians aren't saving enough for retirement, but figures prove her wrong. According to Statistics Canada, private pension holdings in Ontario increased by 47% between 2005 and 2012. Ontarians have doubled their holdings in mutual funds and more than doubled their stocks, and they have made significant investments in real estate property.

The one common characteristic of all these contributions to net worth is that Premier Wynne doesn't have an easy way of dipping into these reserves to finance her government's spending addiction. She therefore needs a new revenue stream with little to no built-in accountability and the floodgate keys in the Premier's office.

The entire purpose of a pension plan and any long-term investment is to lock the funds in and reap the benefits in many years' time. But by the same token, long-term bonds pay a higher rate than short-term ones—the investor is rewarded for confidence and patience. In their first speech on the subject, however, the government makes it clear that the purpose of the ORPP is to be unlocked by the same government that wasted billions on eHealth, power plants and Ornge, and throws good money after bad.

The Liberals have been very open about their intention to use the ORPP for purposes completely unrelated to Ontarians' retirement security. Behind buzz words like “unlocking assets” lies the naked truth that the ORPP would be nothing more than a political slush fund. Moreover, if a supposed toll highway was built with pension money, Ontarians would pay twice—once for the contribution and again through the toll—but receive only a pittance back. This is worse than a Ponzi scheme; even the early participants lose.

Ontarians need this government to leave more money in their pockets so they can save it better than Premier Wynne can ever be trusted to. It is her government that has made life less affordable in this province. A look at household expenditures in Ontario between 2010 and 2013 shows this. Ontarians would save more if this government allowed them to. Instituting another mandatory payroll tax is not the answer, because the money isn't there.

The ORPP will impact small businesses disproportionately. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reported that over 80% of small businesses are opposed to the ORPP and would face difficult choices if it was implemented. Two thirds would consider freezing or cutting salaries to account for the extra contribution, while more than half would scale back on their capital investments or their workforce. When businesses can't invest in new equipment, new locations, new employees and training, we all suffer.

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This government's intention to grind Ontario to a halt by removing capital from the economy, whether through taxes, fees, inflated utility prices or the ORPP, hurts the economy. If we boost Ontarians' earnings and create jobs for the 600,000 unemployed who need our greatest help to return to the workforce, we begin by leaving more money in Ontarians' hands to spend, save and invest according to personal plans and preferences.

I do not believe for a minute that the Premier or any other government official can know what's best for residents of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry 40 years from now. Every worker adapts their savings and investment patterns to long-term goals.

There are always ways to stimulate savings and offer more opportunities for Ontarians to shield income from taxation in order to save for retirement. The mandatory job-killing and unaccountable ORPP, however, embodies the worst defects of the Liberal government: overreaching, patronizing and downright greedy.

We were talking today about a petition on a new Ford plant in western Ontario. Companies are leaving because of payroll taxes. This is another payroll tax. Studies show that this will cost 160 man-years of employment. This is employment when we're trying to help out the people in greatest need, people who are looking for a job today.

We talk about the 600,000. This increases that number. It reduces the revenue that the government has available to them. People who are now retired or unemployed will not see any benefit from this. People who pay into it will not see benefits for many years. It is money that's taken out of the economy. We think we should be investing in the economy and we shouldn't be removing money and putting more stress on our businesses.

An agri-food business in western Ontario is leaving and expanding in Michigan. He quotes two issues: the payroll taxes—he actually mentioned the ORPP—and energy costs. These are direct impacts of this government.

It's time that we start looking at what's best for this province and start looking at putting in plans that actually get people working again—favourable for labour and employers to actually work together as a team, investing in our future. We need to put more money into education. Instead of closing colleges, we should be looking at opening them and maintaining some of the programs we have.

I hear them talk about the importance of the agri-food industry, arguably our number one job generator in this province. The impact, though, is that we closed the only English-language college in eastern Ontario and put the French-language college certainly in jeopardy. We're waiting to see. We just have to turn the scales and do what's right for the province.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm pleased to rise today to contribute to the debate for the member opposite. He mentioned something about affordability, that things are

going up and employers are struggling to pay bills. But also, the everyday person is struggling to pay bills.

I particularly draw the attention of seniors. I was at an event last night, a community kitchen, and they were talking about what kind of people need the community kitchen. Seniors came up because there's a lot of female seniors who are widowed. They used to have two pensions when their husband—or partner or spouse—was alive, but now they're down to one pension. They're really struggling because they didn't have these great jobs that paid a good retirement plan or pensions. They are getting their CPP and the Old Age Security and anything they can max out, but they're still having trouble paying the rent and they're still having trouble buying groceries.

What the London community is doing, and I'm sure many communities across the province, is they have these community kitchens. For this particular example that I went to, for \$25 people come together—all the food is purchased—and they create meals in this kitchen, and you go home with 25 servings for \$25. What I've heard is that, first of all, it's a great thing to get seniors out of their home and socialize. Besides that, there are benefits because the cost of food is going up. Seniors can't afford nutritious meals. So that was a help.

The socialization piece, the affordability piece and the nutrition piece—so when we talk about pensions and we talk about seniors, affordability is a huge issue. We have to do better in the future for our seniors when it comes down to retiring with dignity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I am pleased to rise and comment on the debate on the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act. I couldn't help noticing that in the comments that the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry made, and a few of the other members opposite, they were complaining that when you contributed to this plan you wouldn't actually get any money out for a long time. Well, Speaker, that's what pension plans are. You contribute over the course of your working life so that you can take the money out when you retire. That's how pension plans are actually supposed to work.

What we know is that there are a lot of studies out there that Ontarians aren't saving enough to actually maintain their standard of living in retirement, or in some cases, as the member before me just mentioned, are struggling to buy food. There have been three studies that have been released in the last few weeks that highlight this. One I was listening to on TV the other night that caught my attention was a poll that RBC had just released a few days ago. They talked about the fact that only 39% of respondents had put away any money for their retirement in 2014, and that 30% of the respondents had never put away any money for their retirement. We know that if that's the case, that if people aren't saving for their retirement, they're not going to have enough money to live on when they retire. The average payout by the Canada Pension Plan is only \$6,800. Of course, you

can't live on that when you retire. We need to help people save.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? There are two of you. The member from Simcoe North.

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I apologize. My apologies to my colleague from North Bay.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: They're getting along.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: He's one of the ones I get along with.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Bill 56, commenting to the member from Stormont, my main concern—I'm hearing it from small business operators across the province—just as recently as Monday morning, I had a meeting with colleges and universities in Ontario and they have a real concern on the undergraduate students working at the universities. I have put this on the record because I think it's important that it's on there. It will cost the undergraduate students 1.9% and the university 1.9% as well, so a total of 3.8%. What they're telling me is, this is a budget that is already as tight as it can possibly be and they're asking me to ask the minister. I'm not sure if this government will move this thing forward right to 2018 or not or they'll actually listen to the public and possibly make major changes or even withdraw it. I know this is going to have an impact on a lot of jobs across the province, but if we could at least listen to this one point, and that's the fact that university undergraduate students, who get very few hours to begin with—this is a lot of money out of their pockets, the total of 3.8%. They're asking us to pass this on because this amount of money has basically been frozen for a number of years now. They're actually saying, "Please listen to us. It's something we can't absorb." If the government could listen to that, it just adds to the comments that were made by the member, Mr. McDonell.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to be able to address the comments from the member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

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I listened with rapt attention and I do find it interesting how very different the arguments can be on the same issue. But one of the things that the member mentioned as a concern—I think we would echo the same concern about unlocking value from government assets and the threat of potential use of funds for government purposes other than for retirement. That is something, as we have said before, that we would encourage the government to reassure us of, that that money is going to be further than arm's-length, that it cannot be used for a nefarious purpose or for any other government purpose other than for retirement.

Another interesting point that the member raised was that Ontarians would save more if the government allowed them to. I'm sure we all have heard from our constituents who are struggling with their hydro bills and

struggling to afford health care costs now, insurmountable education debt, child care costs, dental costs, any number of things that are just adding to the financial burden pile of Ontarians. They are having a difficult time saving, and so this Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is an important piece in giving opportunities for those who are not able to, who have not been saving to this point.

When we talk about long-term goals and we talk about retirement, it is a big picture on how everyone fits together in this economy. We've talked about that before, that everyone deserves a chance to participate in that economy, and businesses, of course, will be impacted now, but imagine the shape they'll be in when no one is able to participate and come through their doors.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry has two minutes.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to thank the members from London—Fanshawe, the Minister of Education, Simcoe North and Oshawa for their comments. A lot of it was around the funds our seniors have. I see in our own community that that's a big problem. Food is not readily available for many of them. Food bank uses are way up.

But you look at the costs of necessities that have gone up: hydro costs, property taxes. One of the investments that is very key to our seniors is the fact that, in many cases, they own their own homes. That's going to be less affordable in the future; now we're taking money away that could go to mortgages that are paid off over 20 or 30 years. That reduces the amount of income they have. There is a fear that when you're putting money into some of these volunteer programs or even the pension plans—they typically go into the highest rate of return. These are being put into pools of money that will be accessible by the government. Hopefully, in the future, the government will have the money to pay it back. But we've seen governments around the world that have spending like this one that haven't had the money to pay it back. You go to Greece; pensions were exhausted. That's the fear.

The other issue that I'm raising is that these will not be accessible for many years, because they've made many of the people who are having trouble today think that this will benefit them. Seniors who are needing more money today are looking at a hope from this legislation, but there's nothing farther from the truth, because they will not benefit from it. Many of the people who are having trouble today are unemployed today. They will not benefit either. The people they are helping are the people who are contributing to their own pension plans, hopefully at a higher rate than will be guaranteed through this government, which is only interested in getting money at the cheapest rate and able—I mean, with Moody's latest credit downgrade, there may not be money there on the market for them to borrow in the future.

I want to thank everybody for the comments.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I stand to represent the people of London–Fanshawe as the MPP for London–Fanshawe. I'd like to speak to Bill 56, entitled the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act. It's second reading that we have right now.

While I wholeheartedly agree that we must work toward ensuring all Ontarians will be able to live with dignity and respect in their retirement years, I am concerned about how we are moving forward to achieve this goal. In a report tabled this past December by Statistics Canada, the data shows that 12% of our seniors live in poverty, amounting to almost 600,000 people. Seniors living alone are particularly hard-pressed financially, with more than one in four single seniors, most of whom are women, living in poverty. Given that most retirement experts recommend that we aim to replace 50% to 70% of our income in retirement to maintain a similar living standard, the real question becomes: How are we going to achieve this goal?

Obviously, enhancing the Canada Pension Plan is the best possible option. However, the Harper government stubbornly refused to consider it. Five years later, this government has finally come to understand what New Democrats have been saying: that if we want it, we must take this challenge right here at the provincial level.

Yet the numbers do not favour us. In Ontario, the majority of workers do not belong to a workplace pension plan of any kind. In fact, 66.7% of workers in Ontario currently do not have a workplace pension plan. There are also Ontarians who do have a workplace pension that is not sufficiently keeping them from struggling in retirement. Seniors and retirees are a highly vulnerable group. Many of us, specifically my New Democrat colleagues, have always been very concerned about what will happen when people retire or no longer are able to work.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Folks, you know me: I'm not one to complain. But there's 10 side-bars going on, especially on this side, and I can't hear even a word the member is saying. If you'd like to have a group talk, take it outside, please.

Continue.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker.

That is why my party, the NDP, first introduced a made-in-Ontario pension plan back in 2010. Back then, the Liberal government of the day opposed it, but I'm glad to see that they have since come to see the error of their ways.

That being said, we do have grave concerns that the Liberal government will continue their practice of offering half measures instead of meaningful and real change. We challenge this government to stand up for all Ontarians by not caving in to the insurance industry and other corporate interests. Do not allow the ORPP to become a watered-down version of what is meant to be a secure and adequate retirement income for all Ontarians.

Let's take a closer look at what is being proposed here. I think we can all agree that the devil is in the

details. As I understand it, Bill 56 provides the following directives:

"1. (1) The government of Ontario shall, no later than January 1, 2017 and in accordance with the parameters set out in this act, establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan."

It also lays out that at a later date "the Minister of Finance or another member of the executive council shall introduce legislation that ...

"(b) provides for the administration and investment management of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan through the administrative entity described in section 2; and

"(c) provides for the requirements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, including the basic requirements..."

Essentially, this bill says that another two bills are on the way. One bill will administer the plan and handle asset management responsibilities, and another will deal with the plan design, with all components of the plan mandated to be up and running by January 1, 2017.

I know that I'm not alone when I express a serious lack of confidence in this government's ability to establish an arm's-length administrative body. We need only look as far as the Ornge, gas plant and eHealth scandals to be justified in our skepticism.

Frankly, we can ill afford to allow them to get this one wrong. There are too many people in need of help and too much at stake. Too many people are counting on us to get this done right the first time.

With that in mind, let's return to the bare details that we have been presented with by looking at the schedule of the basic requirements of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Here is what we know:

First, eligible employers and eligible employees shall contribute to the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. This gives us an idea of the obligation of eligible employers to deduct contributions and the remittance to a yet-to-be-established administrative entity.

We find out that the maximum threshold for 2017 will be \$90,000 and that the combined employer/employee contribution rate shall not exceed 3.8%.

It further goes on to note that some employees will be eligible and others will be exempt. Those with a comparable plan will be exempt. Retirement benefits shall be paid for the life of a plan member, beginning at age 65.

At this point, it is unclear what is meant by "comparable." Is a defined contribution plan considered comparable? Long-standing defined benefit pension plans like the OPTrust, OMERS, HOOPP and CAAT Pension Plan, as well as the government-managed Canada Pension Plan, provide significant benefits to our economy yet have received no mention here.

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I did want to note that unlike the CPP, which allows pension contributions on earnings up to only \$52,000 a year, the ORPP, as proposed, would allow contributions on income up to \$90,000 a year. This is a welcome

inclusion that could allow many middle-class Ontarians to save much more than they currently can under the CPP ceiling, meaning their retirement incomes could be substantially higher as a result.

While there are a few more details included, I find that there are certainly more questions than answers raised with this bill. Clearly, there are far more details of the ORPP to be worked out. The government has stated their intention to work them out through consultations, yet for many, the consultation process has been lacking. My office has already begun to receive calls and emails from constituents expressing their concerns about what this bill will mean for them, and quite frankly, I wish I had more information to offer them in return.

I am certain that the insurance and banking industries have been well afforded the opportunity to have their position heard at the highest levels of this government. However, I am focused on the many voices that were not offered a seat at the table during the consultations. It is our duty to speak for those who could not.

According to the 2013 report *Defined Benefit Pension Plans: Strengthening the Canadian Economy*, pensions sustain retirees, lift seniors out of poverty and contribute to the economy of communities.

“Pensions are critical to the economy of smaller towns and rural communities”—that’s something the Conservatives may be interested in—“where they represent a large percentage of local income ... in Elliot Lake, for example, income from pensions (pensions, GIS, old age and CPP) represents approximately 35% of the local economy. The business generated from the resulting retiree spending represents many thousands of Ontario jobs.”

While there may be several factors contributing to the lack of retirement savings in Ontario, we do know that the kind of pension we are proposing here could be a key economic factor to our small and rural communities.

We must look at the long term and the need to ensure a dignified old age over many decades to come. We cannot give in to pressures of corporate need over those of our own seniors and retirees.

Simply stated, New Democrats are seeking to help ensure that our seniors live with the dignity they deserve, and we are worried that this government will cave in to insurance interests and exempt employers. We are obviously in favour of a made-in-Ontario pension plan, and we look forward to seeing the details from the government on exactly how they plan on moving this item forward, and to making amendments to this bill in committee.

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

Mr. Vic Dhillon: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I’d like to introduce—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A point of order?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We don’t normally do that, but since it’s family, go ahead.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I’d like to introduce two very special people who are visiting us today: my sister Kiran

and my sister-in-law Anita Dhillon. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

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

Mr. Grant Crack: Thanks to the member from London–Fanshawe for her introductory remarks.

As you well know, the Associate Minister of Finance, Minister Hunter, has been working diligently over the last number of months in doing the consultations that are required for this particular piece of legislation.

The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act is a very important piece of legislation for the future generations of Ontario. I can tell you that my daughter, Chloe, at 28 years old, and my son, Calvin, at 22 years old—I don’t think putting money away for their retirement is at the forefront of their thoughts at this point.

I think it’s important for us as a government, as we continue to move forward and build a stronger economy, to work together with our younger generation to ensure that in the future, the impact not only on Ontario’s economy, but the national economy, is not negatively affected with the amount of seniors there are going to be in 20 years’ time.

I’m sure, Mr. Speaker, you’re well aware that the number of seniors—including myself; I will be one of them—is going to double over the next 20 years, and we need to prepare for that. This is a responsible piece of legislation.

This pension plan will also alleviate some of the pressures that governments of the future are going to feel as a result of the aging population. I can tell you, Speaker, that there are going to be a lot of different kinds of needs in the future, whether it’s health care or support for senior citizens in retirement homes or long-term-care facilities.

I think that if we can continue to move this piece of legislation forward, continue the debate, let’s see if we can get it into committee as quickly as possible so we can hear from some more stakeholders and pass this important piece of legislation so we can implement it by 2017.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to share some of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce information, first on the ORPP, and most recently their Business Confidence Index, because they’re so correlated. I’m reading from their document here: “The chamber and our members have been worried about the potential negative impacts of the ORPP on the business climate ... we’re convinced that the ORPP should not go ahead. We ... want to see the Ontario government come out with an economic impact analysis of how the ORPP will affect Ontario’s economy.”

Let me tell you a little bit about what their members are feeling. This is from the brand new document called *Emerging Stronger, 2015*. But the name belies the facts. We’re not emerging stronger, if you look at the following:

"In a global context, do you believe the Ontario economy is going in the right or wrong direction?" Last year, 42% of businesses felt we were going in the right direction; this year it plummeted to 29%. That's a startling number.

"How confident are you in your own organization's economic outlook right now?" It plummeted from 74% down to 58%.

"How confident are you in the Ontario economy right now?" It plummeted from 48% to 29%.

The next aspect of it: If you go at all areas of the business climate, whether it's auto manufacturing; down from 71 to 59; if you look at financial services, down from 89% to 71%.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to respond to the thoughtful comments of my colleague from London–Fanshawe on Bill 56, which is, as we know, the first of three bills that are going to come forward where we'll have the opportunity to debate the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

I'm glad that we'll be having so much opportunity in this Legislature to discuss pensions because, as we know, it's a mountain of a topic. It's a hugely important topic to every part of our communities and economic ecosystems.

I'd like to refer to some of the points made by my colleague. It was an interesting point, and I'm glad she brought up the realities and some statistics of women living in poverty. I'm reminded of the conversation we had not too long ago surrounding child care, and discussing that many women are also kept in the home and out of the workforce by the fact that this province hasn't yet shown that they truly prioritize affordable child care, which is one more piece of the economic realities facing many of our families.

We have to have the conversation about the realities facing our families, facing workers. Many people who are struggling in this economic reality could teach the rest of us how to stretch money and how to get by. But we don't want people to just get by; we want them to be able to survive and thrive and live with dignity.

I think it's important for us to ask ourselves what it is that we want for our neighbours, what is it that we want for our downtowns. We want them to survive and thrive long beyond the immediate.

We need people to be able to have enough money that they can spend freely and live freely and walk through the doors of our businesses, go out for lunch with a friend. We don't want our seniors and our retirees to live in fear of the next economic surprise.

1630

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

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this very, very important bit of legislation.

Ontario is taking a very important step in helping millions of people save for their retirement by introduc-

ing our Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2015. The people in my riding of Durham are concerned about their retirement. We have heard from the minister that in her conversations with people across the province of Ontario, people are telling her they're concerned about outliving their savings.

We know that many Ontarians aren't saving enough to maintain their standard of living in retirement. Study after study highlights this. In the past few weeks, three studies have been released, by RBC, Sun Life Financial and CIBC, showing growing numbers of Ontarians have not been saving sufficiently and fear they will outlive their savings.

According to a poll released by RBC, only 39% of respondents put money away for retirement in 2014, and 30% of respondents have not even begun to save at all. Another study released by Sun Life Financial shows that growing numbers of Canadians believe they won't be financially prepared to retire at 65.

The reasons for this undersaving are many. Workplace pension coverage is low and getting lower. Two thirds of Ontarians don't have a workplace pension plan. We also know that voluntary savings vehicles are not enough. In 2012, there was \$280 billion in unused RRSP room in Ontario. At the same time, CPP is not enough to live on. In 2012, the average benefit paid by CPP was \$6,800.

Together—

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I wanted to read this little excerpt from a letter I got from a constituent on this particular topic about her individual situation. She refers to the pension asset transfer under section 80.1 of the Pension Benefits Act. She's pointing out that:

"More than 15 years have passed since the government's commitments were made. In the interim, A Fine Balance, the report of the Expert Commission on Pensions, was presented to the Minister of Finance on October 31, 2008. That report confirmed that I and others had been financially disadvantaged as a result of past government divestments or transfer of employees from one agency or level of government to another, or to the private sector.

"The commission specifically stated that 'These individuals will receive pension benefits that are lower than they would have been if all of their service credits and associated pension assets had been transferred to their new plan.' The commission also suggested immediate action and made recommendations to the government. Following that report, the government made a further commitment to address this issue and received all-party support in the Legislature."

This is what she also said, and I'm reading excerpts:

"Essentially, I am being asked to fund the credited service shortfall caused by the government's failure to honour its commitments to the employees." This is another part of her letter: "The government of Ontario should revisit this issue and amend the process to provide the necessary funding to pay for members' credited

service shortfalls. We should be able to place trust in the words of our government as they were conveyed to us at the time of the divestment and transfer.”

So when we're talking about pensions, we need to have two conversations: the one that we're talking about, a new pension plan, and the existing pension plans for people who are facing these kinds of situations. That's what this government needs to do correctly. It's not just about the new; it's about what's happening with people's pension plans and what happened to this person way back 15 years ago. She's still suffering those outcomes.

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

Mr. Joe Dickson: I should tell you that I will be sharing my time with the members from Halton and Ottawa South.

I'm pleased to speak on Bill 56, the Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Also, the Premier, for her tenacity in going down this road; our finance minister, Charles Sousa; and the Honourable Mitzie Hunter, the associate minister. This is really short-term pain for long-term gain. The real benefactors, of course, are our seniors—including me—and our aging population.

Most people believe that we here have a pension, and a lucrative one at that. Do the feds have one in Ottawa? Yes, they do. Do the provincials have one here at Queen's Park in Toronto? No, they don't. Most people don't really know that, so I thought we'd make them aware of that.

I have to tell you that six years ago I was working on both a private member's bill and a motion to commence the Ontario pension plan becoming part of and an extension to the Canada Pension Plan. We did not realize at that time that Ottawa would not work with us. I had the good fortune to meet with accountants, professionals in the financial community, specialists and actuaries, who are the heart and soul of this process. To a person, to a group, we were advised, “The sooner you start, the better.” It was approved at the first level unanimously, but never proceeded past that, losing its standing on the order paper.

I could also tell you that this plan takes equal contributions from employers and employees, capped at 1.9% on each employee on annual earnings up to \$90,000. If you're earning \$800 a week or \$40,000 a year, a 1.9% cost to the employee is \$760 annually or \$15 a week. The employer will pay the other \$15 for you, and that is an added bonus.

I have a 55-year-old business in Ajax which my family runs. Everybody from the high end is saying that the ORPP is a job-killing payroll tax. Let me tell you: For me, as an employer, I have to pay the same 1.9% for each employee. It is expensive for me, but it is the right thing to do.

One final story—I'm trying to read that clock. Is that 7:05 left, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's 7:02.

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm the oldest of 10 children of Mary and Lou Dickson. Both have passed away, in their eighties and nineties respectively, in the last 10 years. I had bought my parents a home in Florida, so that in their last 15 good years they had a place to reside in the winter.

I get a call one morning at 4 a.m. from a hotel in Georgia. My mother wanted to go home. They were staying at the motel. She wouldn't go to the hospital. She wouldn't go in the ambulance. I spoke to the manager and said, “Get an ambulance. Advise the hospital that she's coming. Arrange a doctor. Call me within one hour,” and two things happened out of that. One is health, and how blessed we are to have health care here. For a 30-hour stay, the bill was \$9,500. When it comes to pension savings, the only pension savings they had, of course, were their 10 children, who certainly took care of it.

I will share my time with my colleagues, Mr. Speaker. I would go to the member from Halton.

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

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I've heard from many young new families in my riding of Halton concerned about the Ontario pension plan. They are living their lives just in time—buying their first homes just in time, raising their children just in time and getting to work just in time—and they are worried that they need to start planning for their futures now. It can't happen just in time.

Our government has a responsibility to the people of this province to ensure that they can enjoy a secure, predictable and comfortable retirement. With our made-in-Ontario ORPP, the government is looking to provide a cost-effective, responsible strategy to help Ontario workers build a more stable retirement future. The program would be the first of its kind in Canada and would initially provide coverage to more than three million working Ontarians currently relying on the CPP, Old Age Security and their own savings.

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The decision to move forward with this made-in-Ontario plan has been driven mainly by necessity. As this government has previously stated, enhancing the federally controlled CPP would be the preferred method for ensuring retirement security. But the CPP as it is just simply isn't enough. And unfortunately, despite a strong consensus among provinces and territories, the federal government has shown a complete unwillingness to engage in discussions and find ways to make improvements to the current system—a decision that flies in the face of their own economic analysis, which shows that a CPP enhancement would benefit the economy in the long run.

Constituents in my riding of Halton are concerned, Mr. Speaker. They're concerned that they have not saved enough or that they may outlive their savings. They're concerned that they don't have an adequate workplace pension plan and they are concerned that they may never be able to retire. This situation is completely unaccept-

able, and I'm sure my colleagues here in the Legislature would agree that no Ontario worker, after a lifetime of working and contributing to the economy, should have to live the rest of their lives fearful for their own comfort and security.

Ontario workers expect their government to take a leadership role in helping to secure their retirement. That's why it's critical that this government take responsible steps to make the necessary changes. By rolling out the ORPP over the next few years, this government will not only be adding a valuable enhancement to the CPP but we will be making sure that we are fulfilling our responsibility to the workers of this province. After a lifetime of hard work, they deserve nothing less.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I'm very pleased to speak to this bill.

I had the pleasure this afternoon of recognizing the newest addition to our family, Vaughan, who is eight weeks old. I'll tell you about the first time I held Vaughan. The first time I held Vaughan, I looked at him—he's beautiful—but I said—

Interjection: He doesn't look like you.

Mr. John Fraser: He doesn't look like me. "My daughter is 35," I said. "Where is he going to be when he's 35? Where am I going to be when he's 35?"

The reason I tell you that story is, it was a very edifying thing to lock into the mind that our responsibility as legislators is to look 10, 15, 20 or 30 years down the road.

We have a pension crisis. That's not something new; that's something that the federal government has identified. They have clearly said that we have a crisis in savings.

Mr. Norm Miller: We don't have a crisis.

Mr. John Fraser: Yes, we do.

The most reasonable and thoughtful and prudent thing to do would be for the federal government to do what all the provinces—including Ontario and indeed the finance minister at the time—were in favour of, which is to enhance the CPP. It's very clearly known that that was the case.

There's an abdication of leadership. The federal government, at its highest levels, has said, "No, we're not going to do that," because they don't believe that that's the right thing to do, apart from the fact that all 10 provinces agree, and some factions inside that government. I think that's a real abdication of leadership. In that leadership vacuum, as legislators, we have a responsibility to look after people's futures, to do what we can to make sure that people have what they need in the future, whether it's health care, whether it's education, or whether it's savings and support for their retirement.

Now, 40 or 50 years ago, when the CPP came in, I remember my mom telling me, "We weren't happy. We really weren't happy when that happened." She was a federal nurse. But do you know what? My mom gets CPP right now, and she said to me, "I'm very glad that we did

that. I'm very glad that as a society we decided to do that."

I'm going to go back to the CPP and say that I really do believe that the failure to enhance the CPP, the unwillingness of the federal government to do that, is an abdication of responsibility. I would have thought that from the other side of the House, we may have heard a bit about that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate—sorry; questions and answers.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Congratulations to the member from Ottawa South on your latest addition to your family. It was really nice to see them here. Of course, I know that the first thing you said to him was, "Welcome to the world. You owe \$23,000." I know that really would have been the first thing that came up.

A financial survey of 12,000 households was conducted quite recently by the world-renowned McKinsey and Co. They told us that 83% of Canadians are on track to maintain their standard of living after they stop working. McKinsey and Co. told us that, "The vast majority of Canadians are saving enough for retirement, to ensure a standard of living similar to their pre-retirement lifestyle, according to a new, large-scale survey of household finances."

Speaker, like everyone in this House, I too would hope and pray that everybody retires with dignity. There's no hesitation to say that. But "McKinsey principal Fabrice Morin said the findings suggest many people are worrying needlessly"—and that's part of what's happening here. "Mr. Morin said that if even 30% of the value of people's homes had been included as a financial asset, the proportion of Canadians with adequate savings for retirement would climb to 87%."

If the issue is, as McKinsey and Co. have stated, that 83% of Canadians are on track to maintain their standard of living, then let's have a program that funds and assists the other 17%. Let's have a program that's focused on the 17% as opposed to imposing a burden on the entire economy of Ontario. If this group needs help, then let's help. Let's not use a sledgehammer to squash an ant.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to comment on the members from Ajax-Pickering, Halton—happy birthday, by the way—and Ottawa South.

It's really interesting because we see this issue through a fairly different lens. That's what's also so interesting about debate in this place, but I'd like to just touch on a couple of the comments that the member from Ajax-Pickering mentioned.

He said that this would be "short-term pain for long-term gain." I will agree with you about the pain part because youth unemployment in this province is the highest in Canada. Youth in this province are paying the highest tuition rates in Canada. Our workplace safety rates are some of the worst in the country. There's a lot of work to do, and it does come down to priorities.

The member points out that, of course, it's the right thing to do, which sounds like a very Liberal thing to say

these days because there are a lot of things that the Liberal government should be doing, especially with regard to the Sudbury by-election and that investigation. There's a lot of things to do about how you save emails and don't delete emails. There's an accountability and transparency issue in this place with this government, and the right thing to do would be to actually remove Greg Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed while that investigation is going on—

Interjections.

Interjection: Pat Sorbara.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Pat Sorbara, yes. I correct my record.

It's really interesting to hear members say, "We have to make sure that we're going to take care of people." When we go through this budget, as the finance critic for the NDP, I'm telling you this budget is going to be a painful budget for the people of this province. It will be even more austere than last year's budget. So you can plan for an Ontario Registered Pension Plan but, right now, there is work to be done in this province to ensure that people can live their lives today with dignity and plan for the future with integrity.

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

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's quite a pleasure for me to rise in the House today to talk about this new pension plan for Ontario. We know that the reasons for this pension plan are many. Workplace pension coverage is getting lower, and two thirds of Ontarians don't have a pension plan. We know that voluntary savings vehicles are not enough.

In 2012, there was \$280 billion in unused RRSP room in Ontario. At the same time, CPP is not enough to live on. The average benefit paid by CPP was \$6,800.

Now, in my past life working in a federal constituency office, I have to say that I've seen quite a number of seniors coming into the office, and sometimes they've lost a spouse, which has a massive effect on their income. It's devastating to see people who cannot manage to live on the money they have coming in.

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I was in the private sector. I had a business, and I can tell you that I would have been absolutely delighted to have this assistance from the government to provide a pension plan for my employees. I had a business in the 1980s, and during that time, I was paying my staff \$15 an hour. That vehicle would have been very much appreciated. I don't buy it that this pension plan is going to put businesses out of business. That's simply not true. A 1.9% contribution for employers is not going to put businesses out of business. I'm not buying it.

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

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's with great interest that I hear some of the comments. I think the member from Kitchener–Waterloo is very right: There are priorities. One of the priorities is getting the people of Ontario back to work. Many groups are saying that if we go ahead with

this, we can expect another 160,000 man-years of unemployment caused by this plan.

I see the students in the gallery here. It bothers me every time I hear about this one-third tuition benefit. Who gets it? Almost nobody. They brag about it, they advertise it, but you don't qualify for it. Less than 10% of the students at Queen's University and Western are actually able to qualify for it. But they brag about it.

We're looking at studies that show we're the third-best country in the world for our seniors living in retirement. This is nothing more than a candy dish for this government because they're running out of money. They're talking about a carbon tax, because they need more money. They're talking about a pension tax, because they need more money. A good percentage of people are not going to contribute to this plan but are going to benefit from it. Who is paying their fee but the people who are paying into it?

There are a lot of things not happening. It was interesting to hear the note how there's no assistance from the government other than demanding that the business contributes the 1.9% and most people contribute the 1.9% on their wages. That's money lost that they could spend on their home or a car—pay them off. The interest they would save by having that money available probably outweighs what they're going to get in the pension plan.

I hear them talking again about seniors looking for it. Seniors will not gain a penny from this. Anybody who is not working or is now retired does not get anything. They don't contribute to it; they don't get anything from it. So let's clear up the confusion. I know it's a great vote-getter, but it's dangerous, and that's what these organizations are telling you. We now have the highest payroll taxes on the continent. Businesses are leaving. That's why unemployment is high.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Ottawa South has two minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you to the members from Nipissing, Kitchener–Waterloo, Kingston and the Islands, and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

I want to address the comments from the member from Nipissing and just make sure, on the record, to say that the first thing I thought when I saw Vaughan was, "You are so adorable and loveable. I want to be alive when you're 35." I wanted to make sure that that was on the record.

To the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, I appreciate her comments very much. I thought she might direct her comments a bit more toward the member from Nipissing because of how far he went, in some ways, with the McKinsey report and the fact that there is a pension crisis here. But I do appreciate her comments in terms of, yes, it is a budget and we do have to make some very tough decisions. We have limited resources. We have to allocate them in the best way possible. There are all sorts of things we'd like to do for people. We can't do them all.

I agree with the member for Kingston and the Islands: Two thirds of people don't have a pension plan. That's a

serious thing. It's not just the fact that they'll need an income and a standard of living. That has an impact on our economy in the future.

Back to the member from Nipissing, in terms of the value of a house: That's if you liquidate your house, and that's assuming that the value in the house is constantly maintained. I mean, people need housing to live.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: You mean you've got to leave your house to get the money out of it? Oh my God.

Mr. John Fraser: It's something like that.

To the member from Stormont-Glengarry—I'll get it right—on first-year tuition: There is an income threshold in that. The plan is being utilized. It's a good plan. It is making tuition affordable for people. What we're trying to do with the pension, too, is to make sure that people can afford to live in a reasonable way when they retire and feel secure.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's my pleasure to rise and join the debate today and speak on Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, 2015. As my colleagues have shared from this side of the House, as a party, we stand united in saying we are strongly opposing this act.

Ontarians should be trusted to save for their own retirement. I can definitely say that the Liberal government can't be trusted to save on their behalf. I share that because there's so many examples. This Liberal government can't be trusted to get anything properly in place. We currently have four investigations going on. We've seen the deletion of emails, Ornge, eHealth—the list goes on and on. So the reality is—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You usually stand up and say "Point of order," and then you start talking. You don't talk before the point of order.

The member from Ottawa South has a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to have this point of order. The member has to speak to the bill that we're—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I would remind the member that we would like to stay within the boundaries of what the discussion is. I think you were wandering a little bit, so if you could bring it back a little bit.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Absolutely, Speaker; I'd be pleased to.

The fact of the matter is, because of all the scandals the Liberals have subjected Ontarians to, they can't be trusted to get a retirement pension plan right. Once and for all, you have to call a spade a spade. You have done a horrible job in managing—wasteful spending, time and time again. You have made this province cash-strapped. As a result, you're looking for any revenue stream to bail yourself out. It's absolutely disgusting.

This Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is nothing but a payroll tax. Businesses will have to find an additional 1.9% of revenue to support the contributions they're going to be made to give into this Ontario Retirement

Pension Plan. It will hurt people who live paycheque to paycheque. That's the reality in Ontario right now.

Earlier today, we had families in here advocating for this government to finally do something right and to allow them to provide for their families that are suffering from aHUS, a debilitating disease.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We're wandering again.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My point is, families in Ontario have so many other worries that require financial attention. They cannot afford to have a spendthrift Liberal government gouging their pockets, because they have family priorities they have to take care of.

Further and above that, another example of how there is very little left over in Ontarian taxpayers' pockets: Last week in my riding, a community had to have a fundraiser for the Bruce Grey United Way. The United Way in our area is running out of money because they're helping so many people keep the heat on. The fact of the matter is, if people can't even afford to keep the heat on, how on earth are they going to afford payment towards an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan that isn't necessary in this province?

It's policies like this one that hold Ontario back and literally drive jobs away. It will force employers to compensate for higher costs with fewer employees—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Barrie.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much, Speaker.

Just in case the member didn't hear it properly, what's going to happen is, when the Liberal government subjects Ontario businesses to the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, they're probably going to lay off people because they don't have the income, they don't have the bottom line to support this type of payroll tax.

This is not what Ontario businesses want. Let's think about Target. Most recently, Target left Canada, and we lost 17,000 jobs overall. In January, specifically, Target cited that the ORPP was one of the reasons that they could not invest in the future in Ontario. In my riding of Huron-Bruce, small business is big business, and it accounts for thousands of jobs and revenue in our communities. Hurting the job creators is the last thing this province needs.

1700

The pension plan worry is shared by so many. For instance, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business notes that 97% of small businesses are concerned about the current state of Ontario's economy, and more than half say that they'll reduce employees if the pension plan goes ahead. When are they going to accept what they're doing to jobs in Ontario? That is the question here. They're driving jobs away because they've had wasteful spending through the last decade, they've had so many scandals, and they need to find new revenue sources to help them pave the way so that they can try to spin a budget that makes sense.

Collectively, we need to be doing everything that we can to make it easier for small businesses to thrive and create jobs here in Ontario. We could talk about energy, but I'll get to that in a moment.

Ontario is becoming less and less competitive. Earlier today I met with the petroleum industry, and they talked about the unintended consequences of the bad policies that are coming out of this particular government. At the end of it all, there is going to be less in the bottom line to employ people in Ontario, and it's a real concern. We're exporting our businesses to the States and to other provinces due to already high payroll costs, high electricity rates and proposed government initiatives such as carbon pricing and the ORPP.

You know, facts speak for themselves. This Liberal government claims that people are not saving enough for their retirement, and that we have a huge economic crisis on our hands. Well, Speaker, again, the only crisis we have is a government that is proving themselves to be untrustworthy based on their by-election initiative in Sudbury, and they're proving themselves untrustworthy because of their many scandals. We have to call this government to account when, in fact, they're trying to create a crisis here, but we know—and we just heard it from the member from Nipissing—that Ontarians are saving enough. From 1999 to 2008, Ontario had the highest savings rate of all provinces in Canada, and currently Ontario sits at the national average.

People who are struggling in pension years are often single, elderly individuals who may have never worked, and only receive 60% of their spouse's CPP. These are the vulnerable people in our society who need help. However, this scheme that the Liberals have proposed will do nothing to help this group.

In fact, back in January, I learned of a family in my riding, and it's a sad state of affairs. Their mother is a single, elderly individual who cannot afford to pay her bills, and as a result, the siblings, on a monthly rotation, are paying her utilities so that she can stay in the family home. That is not the dream that she had for her children. This government needs to stand up and take responsibility for their wastefulness and for their failed schemes like the Green Energy Act, cut out the subsidies that people can't afford, and once and for all, do something that really is respectful of Ontarians.

The reason people are in difficult situations and finding it hard to save is, as I said, solely because of this Liberal government's actions. Hydro rates are skyrocketing, people are finding it hard to make ends meet, and at the end of the month, as I said before, there isn't very much to save for the future, sadly enough. How on earth could they afford further deductions through this imposed savings program?

If this government had a more accurate and transparent energy policy, people would have the extra income to put away adequate money for retirement.

Liberals claim that currently the CPP isn't enough for Ontarians to retire on. That's because—just a reminder—CPP was never intended to be a retirement income, but rather a supplement.

Honestly, people cannot afford an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. This government needs to go back to the drawing board and do better.

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

Mr. Wayne Gates: First of all, I'd like to stand up and congratulate the MPP from Ottawa South, because he talked about his grandchild. Well, do you know what? Let's take a look at the young people who are up at the top here—they're up here paying attention to us—because at the end of the day, this is what it's about. It's about those kids who are here today, those young students. It's about our kids, our grandkids. That's what it's all about. We have to find a way to make sure that when they grow old, when they become seniors, they're not going to have to live in the province of Ontario in poverty, or not be able to pay for their health care. These are things we have to do.

How can we do it? I'll tell you how we do it. We should have done it under CPP. I went to Ottawa a number of times and I talked to MPs from all parties. Almost every party, until the last six months, agreed to enhance the CPP, including Conservatives, including Liberals, including the NDP, because they knew it was the right thing to do. They have a program in place that is already funded. It has enough money in it today to last 75 years. So if we enhance CPP, guess what's going to happen? We're going to be able to take care of our kids and our grandkids who are here watching us today, relying on us to make sure that they have a future when they become retirees.

Take a look at what's going on in our province today. It's our fault, quite frankly, that we have people dying on our streets because it's cold and they don't have affordable housing. What are we doing when we have health care to take care of our seniors and they can't afford it—or hydro bills? We have an opportunity, over the course of the next few days, through this debate, to make sure that doesn't happen to any senior in the province of Ontario ever again and to make sure our kids have a future that they can be proud of, not only for themselves but for their kids and their grandkids.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Eglinton—Lawrence.

Mr. Mike Colle: I just want to comment on the member from Huron—Bruce. I just don't think she gets it. We are trying to help people who are having a difficult time after working very hard for a lifetime, trying to do their savings—but it is very difficult for them once they retire because their pensions are so meagre. The request has been, why don't we enrich the pension to make it reasonable for people to live in dignity in their last years? This is what this argument is about.

I couldn't agree more with the member from Niagara Falls. We have the wealth in this country. The federal government is just about to declare a balanced budget, a surplus, tax cuts. They have the money to help people—we're talking about people.

I'll tell you, there's one person, Edda, in my riding, who worked her whole life for small companies as an

accountant. She has a little house. Now, at 72 years of age, she works as a crossing guard to make ends meet, because the pension she has is not enough. Do you know what she did? She came to me the other day, in private, and said, “Mike, I’m embarrassed. Can I go to the food bank so I can have enough food for me and my disabled son to get through?” That’s disgraceful after all the years that she has worked.

The member from Huron–Bruce says, “You don’t need the money. It’s everybody else’s fault. We can’t do it.” We must do it. We have the ability. We have the will. Stop making excuses why, in this rich country, we can’t help people like Edda, who worked their whole lives and are working a job in this cold weather at 72—and we say to her, “We can’t help you.” That’s wrong.

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

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I’m pleased to respond to her comments. I thought they were excellent.

I want to welcome again the model Parliament students here today. I want to give you a little lesson here; I want to show you: From here over are the Progressive Conservatives; those are the new NDP members, and we can clearly tell that, and that’s actually the government over there, the opposition—I guess some day they will be back in opposition.

1710

I just heard the member from Eglinton–Lawrence’s comments. I can’t understand—they’ve been in power for 12 years. Why didn’t you actually start this Ontario pension plan 12 years ago? Back then, you had that wonderful Liberal government in Ottawa. They would have helped you with it. You did nothing for them. Now you’re blaming Stephen Harper. You’re blaming Stephen Harper for your mistakes—

Interjections.

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

All right. Here’s how it’s going to work, folks: The yelling stops. I’ll give one warning and the next time, hasta la vista. So cut out the yelling across. You go through me.

Continue.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What I’m saying is, if it was so wonderful in the last election, why didn’t they do it 10 years or 12 years ago? Because back then, they didn’t have Stephen Harper to blame. They could have blamed Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien. Why didn’t they do it then? That’s what I’m amazed at. Instead, they wait now till there’s a federal government in Ottawa run by the Conservatives and they try to finger-point everything at them.

You know right well this thing is a disaster. Anybody who’s ever run a business knows it’s a disaster. It reminds me so much of the Green Energy Act, which was another disaster. You all know it. You’ve driven hydro prices so high no one can afford them, and that’s why manufacturers are leaving this province day after day. You know it. They’re leaving this province because of

the Green Energy Act and your incompetence as a government.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Again, it’s my privilege to stand in this fine Legislature and address the comments from the member from Huron–Bruce.

I’m pleased to welcome the students from the model Parliament here. I had the opportunity to connect with them earlier, and that was great. Many of them actually asked me what it was that pushed me into politics, and this is it: fighting for fairness and fighting for equity and opportunity.

To that end, I’d like to address some of the points made by the member: that Ontarians should be trusted to save for themselves. I’d like to challenge the premise of that. I don’t think this is a question of trust. This is a question of opportunity. As we’ve heard ad nauseam from everybody in this room, people are struggling. Whether we’re talking about youth who are unemployed or underemployed, whether we’re talking about students, whether we’re talking about workers, whether we’re talking about future workers, everyone is doing their darnedest to make ends meet and try to get ahead or just try to get by.

Many of the arguments that we hear from the Conservative side here—the Armageddon argument—that businesses are going to pull charity support, send business overseas and job loss. We’re not arguing that there will be an economic impact on those businesses, and to say that’s not what Ontario businesses want, okay, a fair point. But what is it that they want? Do they want customers or do they want window-shoppers? Do they want people who don’t have enough money to spend in those businesses now or in the future? Do they want to close up in 10 years when nobody is able to contribute to the economy?

It’s interesting too about the McKinsey report—a survey of households. How wonderful it would be for Ontarians to be able to plan to afford a house. Many of our Ontarians are struggling to pay rent, transit, dental and child care and all of the things that we talk about for them to even be able to afford a household in order to be surveyed, in order to be asked their opinions. I don’t think that’s worrying needlessly, as the conclusion was.

For seniors who won’t benefit, seniors understand the benefit and they want that for our future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Huron–Bruce has two minutes, and let’s keep it civil.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Okay. Thanks very much, Speaker.

It’s interesting—I appreciate the comments from the member for Niagara. He gave a nod to everyone participating in the model Parliament, but you need to know, based on the deficit and the debt that this Liberal government has created, that you’re carrying \$23,000 of debt on your shoulders today, and if we can’t get this government in line, that deficit is going to impact the debt on your shoulders and our shoulders even more greatly.

To the member from Eglinton–Lawrence: You know what? With all due respect, Speaker, he doesn't get it. Ontarians can't afford any more tax to cover up and pay for the wasteful spending of this government.

To the member for Simcoe North: Thanks for the history lesson and the political lesson. I really appreciated it. You mentioned finger-pointing. It's interesting, Speaker, that the Liberals are doing their finger-pointing at everyone else but them, and the problem actually does rest with them.

To the member from Oshawa: I'm afraid that this ORPP is just another example of a Liberal government picking winners and losers, because not everyone is going to benefit from this pension plan. Unemployed individuals and seniors who already can't afford their utilities—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Eglinton–Lawrence has got to that level. You're warned.

Continue.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you. To close, Speaker, I just want to really emphasize that pension fund benefits belong to the people who contribute to that plan, not to the government who creates it.

The budget outlines that the ORPP funds will be used to fund the Liberals' \$29-billion plan for infrastructure over the next 10 years, just like their Liberal federal cousins, who said just this past January, "If elected, the federal Liberals plan to use CPP contributions to build infrastructure across the country." Again, Speaker, pension fund benefits belong to the people.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Some days, I must confess that the afternoon sessions feel a lot longer. I'm sure that that clock has stopped working.

This is a really, really important issue, and I do want to address some of the design issues that we have flagged on Bill 56. I also want to say that the reasons to move forward on this far outweigh the reasons to not move forward on it.

We do have some concerns, and our concerns are fairly well documented. Obviously the current CPP is lacking, and I agree with the member earlier from Ottawa South that the federal government, under the leadership of Mr. Harper, is not going to be addressing the modernization of the CPP. He's very clear on that. He's very clear on the fact that he doesn't want the long-form census—because you certainly wouldn't want to have the data to actually develop policy and legislation to meet the needs of the people in this country. So I think it's safe to say that we will not be seeing any leadership from Stephen Harper on CPP modernization. That's full stop.

Only 34% of workers have access to a workplace pension plan. This is a huge concern for us, absolutely. That's why in 2010 we brought forward a private member's bill on this issue. At the time, we did not receive support for it from the Liberals, but this Bill 56

has some elements of that legislation and so, of course, we're happy to see it because the end goal is to ensure that people do have some income security down the line, that there is some stability. We've seen what happens when we don't plan for that.

There is an undersaving gap right now, and there are a couple of different reasons for that, to be quite honest. There's more precarious work in the province of Ontario. There is more part-time work in the province of Ontario. There is more contract work in the province of Ontario. Those jobs rarely come with any sort of job security or, of course, any sort of pension plan whatsoever.

The timing of this plan would coincide with the reduction in EI premiums. We are committed, on this side of the House—in this corner of the House, if you will—to ensuring that whatever plan goes forward actually is very strong and actually will be successful. That's encompassing a lot of different voices, because we've been very clear about consulting with a number of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders and we are looking forward, of course, when this does get to committee, to making sure that something happens.

Just to cover a few issues: Obviously the bill is in three pieces of legislation right now. The government plans to implement an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan at a certain date. There's some question as to whether or not the legislation had to come forward in this manner. Certainly we don't need legislation to talk about pensions, but there are obviously some politics at play.

When I speak about politics, it's obvious—the Liberal government is telling a story to the rest of the province about this pension plan. They would like to be talking about anything other than Sudbury or gas plants or emails, so we totally understand—they even rolled out sex ed; that's how bad it is in the province of Ontario. That was the change-the-channel moment. Actually, thanks to the Conservatives, it worked very well for them—not for you guys and certainly not for the people of this province to get some substance, to get some answers from this government on a number of issues that are outstanding.

1720

I just keep going back to this moment during the general election when I knocked on a door and a lady came to the door and she said, "Well, you know, I really need a pension, and they're going to give me a pension." I said, "Well, have you worked ever in your life?" "Well, no, but they said they're going to give me a pension." I think we have to be honest that there's a lot of misinformation out there. A lot of people don't understand what this pension plan would look like for them, especially if they are seniors. We are talking about the future and planning for the future.

After this part of the bill, a second bill will be responsible for the administration and the management, while a third bill will detail the specific design features of the plan. So the government is being very methodical about rolling out this piece of legislation because, quite honestly, I think it's very clear that they're trying to

figure it out. Fortunately, we're here to try to help you in that endeavour.

Obviously, the ORPP will be mandatory for Ontarians without an existing company pension and is expected to be phased in by January 2017. It essentially ensures that employees and employers contribute 1.9% of their earnings toward it, up to a maximum income level of \$90,000. But immediately, Mr. Speaker, the bill doesn't yet stipulate what the minimum threshold is, and this is an outstanding question. It would be really good if someone on that side was listening. Has that been considered, and if so, what is the minimum annual income for eligibility? It does seem to me that those at the lowest level of income would be of greater need than those at the \$90,000 level, as they would not necessarily have the opportunity to invest in savings themselves, given their working years.

We also know that any contributions from the Canada Pension Plan would be paid on top of it. For those employees who earn less than the \$70,000 mark in annual income, the ORPP benefit will end up being less than the CPP benefit. It will only be comparable to the CPP benefit for those earning close to the \$90,000 income range. It would also be significantly less than those benefits provided by other pension plans, like OMERS or the teacher pension plans or HOOPP or OPT. So there are some outstanding questions about the design of the bill.

I want to raise this issue because this has come up just sort of on the surface. The member from Oshawa recently in her comments addressed the fact that there is some concern about what will happen with this pension fund. I'm going to read, actually, from the budget. Another concern that we have around the design of the ORPP is concerning a little section in the 2014 budget, and it reads like this: "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," and then they've tied those funds to the AFP process, which the Auditor General of this province has highlighted as being very concerning.

Actually, I just had a really good meeting with the Auditor General. I went through some of the numbers that she highlighted. There's a very organized pro-P3 movement that was, obviously, not very impressed with that Auditor General's report. In fact, the government has been fairly flippant about it.

But this idea that pension plan funds would be pooled and then redirected to another obvious need—I mean, this government is obviously desperate for revenue streams. We've seen that time and time again. Ed Clark has been charged with unlocking value, if you will.

So this is a red flag for us because, quite honestly, there is not a lot of trust on this side of the House when the Liberal government starts talking about unlocking value. We haven't seen any evidence that that can be successful, and one has to question, if the design of this

plan does not meet some of the outstanding questions that we've already outlined, where is this money going to go? How is it going to be managed? Quite honestly, the Auditor General said that \$8.2 billion was overspent on those infrastructure projects, those 74 infrastructure projects. In the analysis of the value for money and the risk, she said that there's no empirical evidence to it. So, really, when you look at the numbers for those 74 infrastructure projects, we spent, just on additional financing, at a high interest rate—credit card rates, borrowing money—\$6.5 billion.

That is an obvious place where this government, I would hope, would be looking to find savings, so that all the other issues that we've raised here around why an ORPP is necessary—around senior levels of poverty, around gaps in health care funding, around a lack of vision around child care and the gaps in quality child care. There's a lot of money going to those financial corporations and those banks and those lawyers and those consultants that should be directed to the needs that we see every day in our ridings.

When the finance minister highlights the fact that he sees the ORPP as pools of new capital, it's quite concerning for us. We hope to find some clarity as this bill moves forward. As I said, we're committed to making it stronger and listening to those diverse voices who want to weigh in on it.

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

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. It's always a pleasure to speak when you are officiating in the chair.

I would like to salute, to begin with, the member from the third party from Kitchener–Waterloo. I think her sensible and measured comments, plus support, plus ideas about how certain things can be improved and sort of streamlined, are well taken, and we look forward to meeting her in committee.

I would, Speaker, with your indulgence, like to speak about three different kinds of spans. One is lifespan, one is health span, and the third is the money span. Unfortunately, the demographics are telling us that these are not coincident. If you're born in 1900 in the country of Canada, your life expectancy as a male is approximately 53 to 55 years. If you're born today, your life expectancy hits about 80 years. So you're looking at a 25-year increase—yes, miracles of modern medicine, antibiotics, public health etc. The point is that we are now outliving our money and, by the way, potentially, as you've just cited, the health care system as well. That is a demographic, that is a wave, that is a tsunami that is not really subject to opinion—for example, whether it's evolution or not—that's a reality. That is happening.

By the way, you don't have to go too far out of the jurisdiction of Canada or Ontario: Why do you think Detroit filed for bankruptcy? It was their unfunded pension liabilities which were among the lead items that caused that bankruptcy—with due respect to the Fraser report and the RAND Corp. and the McKinsey report. This is reality, and we must deal with it.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I listened with interest to the remarks of the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. Actually, her remarks reinforce my resolve to oppose this thing. The remarks by the member opposite there really reinforced my resolve to oppose this thing.

This is a cash grab; that's all it is. They have no interest, really, in the pension plan per se. It's called a tax grab. They're short of money. We are in debt up to our ears, and they can't understand this. They just want more and more money coming in.

They blame the federal government for not helping them out. Why would anybody want to do business with this government? They haven't got the resolve to spend things wisely. I will give you a list of examples: Ornge, eHealth, the gas plant scandals, Sudbury. Come on, guys. Speaker, this government doesn't know how to be responsible with the funds they have. They don't have that responsibility. It's not in their DNA, sir, respectfully.

When I listened to the remarks from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, she threw up a lot of red flags as to why we shouldn't trust this government with more of our constituents' money. We can't. We shouldn't. They don't know how to be responsible with it, and that's been proven too many times in the past 10 years or so. We're \$23,000 in debt per person in Ontario. I'm expecting another grandchild in June; that's 23,000 bucks on that poor little child's shoulders. We can't trust them.

1730

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise and share my comments for the member from Kitchener–Waterloo and to build on some of the points that she touched on, but I'd like to start with what the member from Etobicoke North had talked about. He talked about three different spans—I believe it was lifespan, health span and money span. I'd like to talk about a different span, a career span.

In my city—not just in Windsor West, but in the neighbouring riding of Windsor–Tecumseh—we are very proud of the automotive industry, not only the plants that build the vehicles but those that feed parts to the vehicles. The people who work in these plants generally put in 20 or 30 years working in a plant toward a private-company-provided pension. We've often then seen these private companies suddenly close up shop, and these people are without pensions now. That's something that I think the government needs to be looking at, some sort of protection for the people in the private sector who work all their lives toward a private-sector pension and then find out near the end of their career that that pension is no longer available.

Certainly in my riding a big concern is the ability for people to retire with dignity and security. Had the federal government stepped up when they should have, then there could have been enhancements to the CPP and we wouldn't be having this discussion today, but un-

fortunately they dropped the ball, so this discussion is necessary. I know that people in my riding discuss affordability issues; that's certainly a concern, for them to be able to afford to eat, to keep the lights and the heat on, and to survive. In order to do that in their senior years, we need to have something in place in order for them to be able to save, to be able to afford some of the costs of living and to potentially put money back into our economy. That's a big concern.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker. I didn't realize you were going to see me from the side, but you're very observant. You're doing a great job.

Let me just make some comments on the dialogue from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo. It's not very often that both sides of the House agree on certain things. This is one of those things. There's a lot of passion, from the third party and us, to get this done. Let's get it over with. We've heard, even from the opposition, "Why didn't we do this 12 years ago? Why didn't we do it 15 years ago?" They're admitting, maybe, that we should have done it. It hasn't been done, so let's do it.

I would plead—I'm virtually going to plead—with the members of the House. We've debated this piece of legislation for over nine hours. Over 55 members spoke to this piece of legislation. I think that this legislation needs to go to committee so that we can do some fine-tuning and take on the concerns of the folks who have shown a lot of interest from both sides, so that we can come up with some final results.

I would say that this is not new. It was part of our budget—which, frankly, none of the opposition supported. It was part of our platform. When we as the government side and the NDP members, the third party, support it, let's get this done. I'm not trying to rush it, but I'm just saying that we've heard it over and over again. I'm calling on the opposition: Please let this debate collapse, so that it can go to committee and get all the good work that committees do—because that's where the nuts and bolts are finalized—and let's bring it back to this House and get it done with. I can't be any more straight than that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Kitchener–Waterloo, two minutes.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to the members from Etobicoke North, Perth–Wellington, Windsor West and Northumberland–Quinte West for their feedback.

The member from Etobicoke North says that we're outliving our money. That's a long-standing issue, I think. I guess we should commend ourselves for being a healthier society, but there is a reason to plan.

The member from Perth–Wellington says that my comments convinced him to vote against it. I guess that's my job. From my perspective, from our perspective, there is legislation that is worth standing up for and working for to strengthen. There are some outstanding questions, as I mentioned, around the design of this piece of legisla-

tion, which need our attention and which we're committed to doing.

I did wonder how long it was going to take for a member to bring up the issue of evolution. That was just in time, I think.

Around the fiscal part of this piece of legislation, fortunately today it was just announced that the Financial Accountability Officer—the motion was passed, and he has been hired. This was something, as you know, that we fought for because we recognized that there needs to be another lens of fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency in this House. We're looking forward to this independent officer of the Legislature getting work done and applying a new level of scrutiny to financial decisions in this House. I think that that has actually been a long time coming. I hope that, as an independent officer of this Legislature, the Financial Accountability Officer may garner a little bit more support and respect than the Auditor General, who brought forward a very thorough Auditor General's report just before Christmas which was dismissed by the Liberals. That's an improvement we fought for and are very proud of.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It gives me great pleasure to rise today on behalf of my constituents of Windsor West to speak to Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Before I start on my remarks, I want to thank the member for Oshawa and NDP pension critic for her excellent lead speech and work on this file.

As everyone in this chamber is aware—and if you're not, I'll be sure to repeat it a few times during my time today—my community of Windsor West offers some of the highest-quality labour across the province, in a number of industries and across a number of sectors. We have a developing technology sector, a thriving tourist and service sector and, of course, a strong foundation in automotive and auto parts manufacturing.

Windsor has one of the most celebrated automotive sectors in North America, and the industry is woven into the fabric of our community. One of the cornerstones of the automotive sector and truly one of the many reasons this industry is so attractive to work in is the historic quality of the private-sector pensions offered to auto workers.

I think it's important to note that workers fought hard for these pensions and continue to fight hard to preserve their retirement security along with that of the next generation. We have some of the best union representation from the auto sector in the country, with Unifor Locals 444 and 200, to name just a couple. These locals have active retirees' associations that continue to contribute to our economy, and I'm always glad to see representatives from these organizations at events in Windsor.

When people feel safe and secure in their retirement, the whole community benefits. Pensions allow people the freedom to retire securely. This means more time spent

with friends and family and enjoying what you have worked your whole life to achieve. It also means the financial freedom to travel and spend time enjoying local attractions like golf courses, coffee shops, fitness centres, our wonderful waterfront and casino, and experiencing all that Windsor has to offer.

The whole economy benefits when retirees have a disposable income that can be injected back into our economy. This lifestyle is threatened. Young workers today do not have the same access to the pension plans their mothers and fathers did before them. All too often I receive calls from someone who has taken out a student loan to get an education only to graduate and be forced to work multiple jobs in an unrelated field to pay back their loans.

All too often, these workplaces do not have workplace pension programs. In fact, roughly two out of three Canadians do not currently have a workplace pension. Even among the one third that does, their pension plans may not be sufficient to carry them through retirement.

The retirement security crisis is not a trend that will manifest itself at some point in the distant future, but something we are experiencing right now across the province. As stated by our critic in her lead address to this chamber, the average monthly cost for seniors' housing in Ontario last year was over \$2,750. If we look at 2012 housing data for people over 65, seniors are coming up more than \$500 short every month. That's only taking housing into account.

1740

The bill before us today, Bill 56, seeks to address at least part of this problem by closing the gap between what people are saving for retirement and their projected expenses. The details of the bill have been discussed at length, but I think it's worth it to bring up a few key issues of this bill and what we know so far about the ORPP.

The bill states: "The government of Ontario shall, no later than January 1, 2017, and in accordance with the parameters set out in this act, establish the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan."

The bill goes on to state that another bill will be tabled and will outline who will administer and manage the plan, along with detailing a yet-to-be-established administrative entity.

What will the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan look like? So far, we know that the ORPP would make both the employer and employee contribute to the plan to a maximum of 3.8%. We also know that the maximum threshold will be \$90,000.

If this discussion around the ORPP is starting to sound a bit familiar, that's because it is. As the people of Ontario know, the NDP has long been a supporter of public pensions. As everyone in this chamber knows, we proposed an Ontario public pension plan back in early 2010, although there are some differences between our plan and the plan being discussed in 2015. This was done after extensive consultations across the province with hard-working Ontarians who wanted more stability in their retirement.

Unfortunately, the Liberal government of the day did not support this plan. They did not support the idea of an Ontario pension plan back then. Well, we all make mistakes, and I'm glad to see this government has finally come around and embraced the idea of a pension plan for Ontario. It's unfortunate that the government is only getting around to developing this plan now, when we could have started implementing an Ontario pension plan as far back as 2010. Better late than never, I suppose.

Windsor did have a chance to weigh in on the pension plan in February. One of the issues that came up was the failure of the federal government to increase existing Canada Pension Plan contributions. Rather than acknowledge this crisis, the federal government recommended a pooled retirement pension plan, or PRPP. These plans put big banks ahead of people, and that is something we don't support. So in the absence of the preferred option of expanding the CPP, the Ontario pension plan is the next best thing.

Chris Taylor, president of Windsor and District Labour Council, stated, "The federal government unfortunately refuses to act on that plan and that leaves little choice but for provinces to come up with bold plans to ensure the betterment of the people in their province."

As the member representing Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake mentioned while speaking to this bill yesterday, it's not that Ontarians don't know how to save; it's that the cost of living in this province is so high that people are struggling.

Every week, my office receives calls and emails about hydro bills that are out of control. My constituents email me copies of their hydro bills under the heading, "The middle class cannot afford this." One person stated, "Our hydro bills are costing us an arm and a leg. People are having trouble paying \$200 to \$300 a month and the cost of living is going up. I don't know ... soon people aren't going to be able to pay rent, food ... bills etc."

Well, Speaker, I listen and I tend to agree. This is why we are struggling to save in Ontario.

Along with the ORPP, we need to find ways to make life more affordable. We need to find ways to increase employment in southwestern Ontario, invest and diversify our economy.

Many people in this province are forced to move to find work, or circumstances see them change jobs throughout their lives. I held a number of jobs before the people of Windsor West elected me to be their representative. As a teen, I took my first job at a local café, then went on to be a dental assistant and, finally, a marriage officiant. Since a number of people in Ontario hold multiple jobs throughout their lives, the government needs to consider the issue of portability of the ORPP. As people move between workplaces, their pension needs to move with them. We need to account for a number of unique circumstances here, including how to accommodate workers that move in and out of the province.

We also need to consider how this plan will impact workers that have a comparable pension and then move to a workplace that does not. How will this plan affect

these workers? I hope the government consults with people experiencing these conditions as the government moves forward with the ORPP.

Speaker, I've enjoyed my time speaking to this bill and the future of the ORPP today. Pensioners know the value of pensions, and Ontarians know the value of pensions. Specifically, I want to thank all the pensioners who are standing up for the next generation of workers. They want our young people to be able to enjoy their retirement and have a similar standard and quality of life in their retirement as the generation that came before them. This is admirable, and it makes me proud to be from this province.

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

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure to speak today on Bill 56 and to support a lot of what the member from Windsor West is saying about the ORPP.

First of all, she mentioned portability. Yes, it is very important for a pension plan to be portable. I always say that these pensions were designed years ago when you started to work at 16 and you stayed with the same employer all your life, but it's not the case today.

Only one third of Ontarians have a pension plan, so it's important that we support this bill, and it seems like the NDP will be supporting the bill. We know that the Conservatives are not going to support the bill. So I would like all this discussion to collapse and move it to committee. If there is a need to improve the bill, that's the place where we could do it.

A lot of us have spoken on it, and it seems like we need to have this happen; otherwise the government will have to support all these retirees who will not have a pension. So I'll say today that we should all support this to go to committee for improvement, if there is a need to improve the bill.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I want to thank the speaker from Windsor West. I think she made some good points.

It's important to note that everybody—there are people who need help. I see them every day. Most of the people who come in can't get their health benefits. People who don't have some type of medical plan are in trouble in this province, and that's not something that the pension plan will help. That's something that this government can help with.

I was a little distressed when I heard the member from Eglinton–Lawrence talking about an elderly couple with a disabled child. I see that. I was surprised at the number of people who have disabled children. It's embarrassing that we're expecting the parents to take care of them. This province is rich enough that disabled people should be looked after by this government. It's a shame that there have been no increases for 10 years. We met with the groups, and they've had no funding increases for 10 years.

We talked about people who get no respite. This is something that's not going to be solved by a pension

plan. This is a problem with this government and priorities. They talk about one third of the people having pension plans. Most people in this province have saved for themselves. RRSPs and the different plans have enough money that only 13% of the people actually need help.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Attorney General is on a roll.

Mr. Jim McDonell: So we should be doing something to look after the 13%, not the 66%—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Attorney General is now warned.

Mr. Jim McDonell:—that would cause this province to be bankrupt. We have to start looking at priorities and directing our funds wisely. Developing another pot of money that this government gets their hands on is the wrong thing to do, because when people need this money in 30 or 40 years, when they need it, it won't be there. We've seen this time and time again. They've doubled the revenue that they're taking in, but we're not seeing the results. There should be a lot of caution towards this, and that's why we have a problem with it.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to be able to stand again and address Bill 56 and respond to thoughtful comments from my colleague from Windsor West, who reminded us that of course pensions for auto workers and active retirees really contribute to our communities. Representing Oshawa, we have our strong Local 222, and I've had many opportunities to meet with different pensioner groups.

1750

It is important to stand here and not just talk about the ORPP but to talk about existing pensions and ensure that we are prioritizing them. There are two conversations happening at the same time: this new plan and ensuring that it is developed and designed for those who don't have a workplace pension, and to focus on securing and strengthening and protecting existing pensions.

Recently, GM committed to doing business in Ontario and to continue doing business in Canada. That's very important for those in Oshawa who now know that their pensions are secure, at least in the foreseeable future.

But as my colleague mentioned, some existing pensions are insufficient to provide for people in their retirement. I think those individuals need to be factored into the conversation, as we've talked about, when we're looking at specific design features of this new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan and talking about comparability. I would challenge the government to look at the arguments for universality and how to include more people, to look at those arguments so that you're not just comparing plan to plan but specific situations, people to people.

My colleague also mentioned CPP expansion. We all agree that would benefit the most and be the most

effective. We look forward to that happening under our soon-to-be Prime Minister Thomas Mulcair.

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

Mr. Chris Ballard: It's always a pleasure to be able to stand and talk about the future of Ontario seniors and talk about the importance of this pension plan in making sure that seniors of the future can live a reasonable life, a life that isn't filled with poverty. I can't for the life of me understand how anyone could argue against that.

I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I'd really like to call on the opposition to allow the debate to collapse and send this on to committee. The bill has been debated for nine hours plus; over 56 members of the Legislature have either spoken to this bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments. Listening to the debate, it's clear that the majority of members are in support of this bill, with a few exceptions. I'm calling on the opposition parties to help us move forward with this important piece of legislation so we can continue to debate other bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Windsor West has two minutes.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the Attorney General, the members from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry—I did have to write that down to remember it—Oshawa and Newmarket-Aurora for their comments.

I'm happy to hear that the Attorney General acknowledges the importance of portability when it comes to pensions. That's a great concern for many people.

The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry touched on some affordability issues and the cost of living. Again, the cost of living is quite high. We have people who are deciding between paying a hydro bill and being able to eat. That's a very unfortunate circumstance, and that shouldn't be happening. If those people didn't have to make a decision like that, if the hydro rates weren't so high, they would likely have the money to put aside into a pension plan of their own. So I would call on the government to address those issues and make life more affordable for everyone across Ontario.

The member from Oshawa talked about protecting pensions across the board, not just public pensions but those from private companies as well. I know I touched a lot on the auto sector and the manufacturing sector. But there are other sectors as well that have private pensions, and the people who devote their lifetime to working in these businesses need to know that when they're ready to retire, their pension is safe, that a company can't just close up shop and leave, and they've lost everything that they have worked for.

The member from Newmarket-Aurora talked about poverty. Again, I believe that goes back to talking about making life more affordable for everyone. The government certainly needs to do a lot of work around poverty and making life more affordable, giving people the opportunities to be able to save for their own future, for education, for a home and for a life in post-retirement.

So, again, anything that would support someone having security in their retirement, I think, is a good direction to be moving.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. It being close to 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1755.

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Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
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Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
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Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
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Kathryn McGarry, Eleanor McMahon
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