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Thursday 26 February 2015

Jeudi 26 février 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 26 février 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO 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 25, 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 Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When we last met the member from Windsor West, from the NDP caucus, completed, and now it's rotation for further debate.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Two minutes, Mr. Speaker? Is that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No. Rotation. Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm a little disappointed that the government members did not wish to participate in this round but maybe the next round they will participate.

Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act—my poor colleague has just come in and I have his desk covered in paper. He'll have to—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: They should be speaking.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, we already mentioned that they should be speaking. But anyway, again, next time.

This was in the election. It wasn't the thing you heard at the doorstep all the time because they couldn't believe a government would actually come in and put more taxes on businesses.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: The member from Peterborough likes to interject in the discussions, which is absolutely fine—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, it's not.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Actually, the Speaker says, "No, it's not." So there you go: a higher authority than I, Jeff—or the member from Peterborough.

I can tell you that the businesses are none too happy, but the key—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: They don't care about businesses.

Ms. Laurie Scott: No, they don't care about businesses but they pretend to over there. Businesses don't believe it.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, we'll do a few little quotes for you. We'll do some quotes for you later on.

The key difficulty with the proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan outline is that they're trying to address a problem that doesn't exist. Studies by McKinsey and Statistics Canada show that about 80% of Canadians have more than adequate retirement income.

First of all, the government is using—I'm going to say ORPP from now on—the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan to distract from the real economic crisis in Ontario, which is the \$300-billion provincial debt and the \$12-billion deficit. The government debt is increased by \$1.4 million every hour and \$33 million every day. I know those are a lot of numbers, and the average person maybe isn't paying attention—they're just actually trying to get by and how they can pay their hydro bill, really. Those are huge, huge numbers. We already had Moody's, I believe it was this week or at the end of last week—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: End of last week.

Ms. Laurie Scott: End of last week. Moody's gave us another scathing report, saying that our debt is worse than Quebec's, and that's quite bad. But the government again tends to ignore what these rating institutions say, and ignore what business and the average person says, really. They have not provided any economic analysis of the ORPP. They don't care how many jobs will be lost. Their own Ministry of Finance said there would be hundreds of thousands of jobs lost if they bring it in.

The government has not identified exactly who will be forced to join this ORPP. They have not defined "comparable workplace pension plan." It's certainly something that many people have responded to. I encourage all my chambers of commerce to certainly give you feedback so that you on the Liberal side can't say, "Everything is okay in my riding," because it's not okay in your ridings.

The government hasn't divulged how much the ORPP will cost to administer. They have not identified what will happen with self-employed Ontarians and what will be the minimum threshold for earnings. Why is the maximum earning threshold nearly double the threshold of the CPP? Will employees under the age of 18 be exempt from the ORPP?

The government has tried to convince the public that the ORPP will operate like the Canada Pension Plan when, in fact, it will be modelled on the Quebec Pension Plan. It's funny, not really telling the exact accuracy—can I put that word out?—to the people of Ontario.

The government has not been clear with Ontarians that their \$29-billion infrastructure plan cannot happen without the Ontario Registered Pension Plan. The government has eroded public trust so deeply over the past decade with their billion-dollar scandals and spending mismanagement that why would the people trust this government with another dime of their hard-earned income—nobody is listening.

Finally, I have not received any indication from any Ontarian or Ontario business that they're in favour of this proposal. I have only received lengthy, well-researched letters in opposition to the Ontario Registered Pension Plan, and I'm certainly going to share them with the government so they get the same letters that I'm getting.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. I'm sure all the guilty people know who they are. I'm trying to get some quiet. If you could just come to order, I'm sure the speaker wants everybody to listen. Thank you.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Let's start with what the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has said on this topic. The CFIB presented its sound analysis of the ORPP at the pre-budget hearings held by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs less than a month ago. At the hearings, the CFIB vice-president, Mr. Plamen Petkov, commented on the lack of public understanding of the ORPP proposal: "I'm not quite sure, though, that the average Ontarian actually understands that this is going to be money coming from their paycheque. I think they are going to realize that after they see that deduction in 2017 onwards."

Just back to my original point, people in the election weren't really understanding the impact this was going to have on them, if they were thinking about it at all. Most, in my area of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, were thinking that they couldn't pay their hydro bill, and how were they going to put food on the table.

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

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

The people I explain this to say, "I'm going to lose my job." Up in Haliburton, they're like, "I'm going to lose my job, because my employer cannot afford to keep me on." And you see that across all the small businesses. They're having fewer employees, and the mom-and-pop shops, or whoever the owners are, are working longer hours.

So, the CFIB, which represents a huge number of businesses, is not wrong. I get the same feedback in my rid-

ing. So, I think the member from Peterborough—I invite him to come up on a tour of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

0910

Anyway, the CFIB did a poll to see what employers would do if the plan was forced on them. Implementation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan: "Do you support the implementation?" Eighty-six per cent of Ontario businesses in the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said no—get the message. "If implemented, what impact would paying additional ORPP premiums have on your business?"

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister of Agriculture, will you come to order.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It's 2015, the member from Peterborough.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. Minister, I'd ask you to come to order—second warning. Thank you.

Ms. Laurie Scott: There's so much to say and I've only got a few minutes left here now.

So 86% of Ontario businesses in the CFIB said they didn't want it implemented. "What impact would paying additional ORPP premiums have on your business?" Sixty-nine per cent said they would freeze or cut salaries, 53% said they would reduce the number of employees and 52% said they would reduce investments in their business. So it's not just me making these things up, this feedback. This analysis tells us exactly what the business community is thinking about in 2015, not decades ago, as the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is trying to tell us.

My office has also heard from the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association on this proposed ORPP. They stated that as an industry "we cannot afford an additional pension plan one made in Ontario. Many are living paycheques to paycheque to make ends meet. Your government"—the Liberal government—"is putting significant pressures on employers to deliver a new pension program...." That's what you're doing. You're putting it on the employers.

They went on to say—this is the Ontario Restaurant Hotel and Motel Association—"The ORPP will likely limit economic growth in our industry and hit the youth the most." We already have high, high youth unemployment, so you're going to make that worse, the Liberal government. "Employers will hire less full-time employees, hire less youth, hire fewer employees and expect more of those that remain employed. A 1.9% increase in labour costs is a significant new cost to absorb in a low-margin industry where labour represents the largest expense. To add to this, the additional administrative costs required to meet an accelerated implementation timeline will only increase the negative impact on businesses."

With the addition of the ORPP, we will see the cost of doing business in Ontario continue to rise.

This government totally ignores what businesses are saying. They're asking people who can't pay their hydro bill, if they are lucky enough to have a job, to pay an extra 1.9% off their paycheque. They're asking their employer, who is having a hard time paying the hydro bill and wants to give jobs to local people—they are going to be taxed. And yes, it's a tax. We have the highest payroll taxes in the country; that will continue. We have the highest hydro rates in North America; that is continuing.

At what point do you not see that people are backed up against the wall? There is no margin for them. I can go on with stories, as I've said before, where people are selling their houses; they can't afford to stay. There's no question, businesses are leaving Ontario. They're not coming into Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I hate to have run out of time, but I have.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's a pleasure to join debate this morning. I'm hearing from the member from Kawartha Lakes–Brock—am I correct there?

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. Thank you. They disagree, of course, with the government's direction on the imposition of the ORPP. We have our own concerns about its implementation, as well, in the simple fact that it doesn't seem as though it will be universal, nor does it seem as though it will ultimately cover or service those most vulnerable in our society and in our province who are in desperate need of some retirement security.

This is not a new issue, Speaker. For decades we've seen that there has been an imbalance, inequality in terms of income, where the very wealthy are getting wealthier, the middle class is eroding and the poor are getting poorer. There's has been no real, tangible effort on the part of any government—specifically the provincial government, nor the federal government—to make any effort to buffer that. New Democrats have proposed our own plan, but as you see—this morning I woke up and I saw CBC News-world talk about the fact that RRSPs eat up a massive amount of the funding or the cash in administrative fees. They are not a vehicle for secure retirement. They aren't the vehicle of choice; they shouldn't be the vehicle of choice. However, it seems as though this government is going to rely on a private vehicle, ushering in private entities to manage, to organize and to direct these funds, rather than a solely public entity that would lower those administrative fees, give those retirees the most return for their buck and also guarantee and ensure retirement security.

They're on the wrong path. They're doing something, but we aren't sure it's the right thing.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It was entertaining listening to the member from Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I am somewhat fascinated by the Conservatives these days. They

cannot support a pension plan, but they support income splitting. I don't quite get this. Maybe the member from Kawartha Lakes–Brock can explain why her party thinks that upper-middle-income, middle-income and modest-income Ontarians should be paying a huge amount, taking billions on in costs, so that the top 10% of retired Canadians—who already are seeing faster income growth than they've ever seen before—can be even richer. Why does she not think that that's an enormous burden?

If you just simply could get the federal government to give up income splitting and put that money into the Canada Pension Plan, which is what we wanted in the first place, every single criticism you've made would evaporate in a nanosecond. But this is why the Conservative Party constantly loses seats and is going to lose the next federal election: because they're so ridiculous, from not believing in evolution to believing that stripping 80% of Canadians in their retirement of their income to support the highest income earners in the country makes sense.

The CFIB, I hate to say, is wrong. It's not an economic analysis; it's an opinion survey. Every economic analysis of minimum wage increases and pension benefits shows job growth and GDP growth. You cannot, my dear friend, produce a single study that says contrary, because it doesn't. So you're left to an ideological, single-owner organization pretending to be a substitute for chambers of commerce that does opinion surveys with no background or data. It is laughable.

You were opposed to the HST, which would reduce the cost of business by \$8.5 billion. You couldn't even agree with your federal cousins on that. But for some strange reason, you won't believe in evolution and you believe in income splitting. You're going to be the fourth or fifth party. Sudbury was just the beginning.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I want to offer another view of the instability that this undertaking by the government is creating. I want to look at it from the point of view of the employee, who, all of a sudden, is going to have to have a deduction on his paycheque of 1.9%. For people who want to split hairs about whether it's a new tax, it doesn't matter. It's 1.9% coming out of his pocket. That's what the employee understands.

The employee also understands that there's a huge mystery around whether or not existing pension plans will be allowed. The government comes up with this notion of "comparable," but no one has a definition of "comparable." There are some pensions, then, that will be more expensive now than paying 1.9%, so there's going to be a disruption and instability over just the issue of whether you're in or you're out.

0920

One of the things about having a pension—because the government likes to compare it to CPP—is that it has to have many, many contributors. In the case of CPP, it's the entire country. In the case of the proposed bill here, you're looking at a relatively small number of people.

We don't know when this starts; we don't know when the first cheque is cut. It's a huge question mark for anyone contemplating what the government is suggesting.

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

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to join the debate today, having listened to the concerns of the member from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. I appreciate the comments of the member from Essex; the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change—his comments were quite entertaining; followed by the member from York-Simcoe.

I'd like to address something—I had the pleasure of speaking for 10 minutes to this bill yesterday—which was a common theme, which is affordability. The reason that we're looking at implementing the ORPP is in order to help people save for their retirement. I think ultimately, when you look at the cost of hydro, the cost of living in general, it is prohibitive for many people to be able to put money aside. Often they're faced with the decision of whether they're going to keep the lights and the heat on or whether they're going to eat. I think that's something that the government needs to be looking at: bringing the cost of living down so that people have the ability to put money aside and ultimately have some disposable income to spend in our communities.

I also spoke yesterday to private pensions. My riding specifically has a large manufacturing area, a large automotive sector, and all have private pensions through their companies. Unfortunately, we often see these companies—people work there 20, 30 years, thinking that at the end of their career they're going to have a solid pension. Unfortunately, too often we find these companies close up shop, leave town, and these people who have worked their whole life towards a pension no longer have that retirement savings. I think we need to come up with a plan to protect those people who have worked all their life for that security in their retirement.

I'd just like to reiterate again, I think it's important to give people the opportunity to save for retirement, and I think a big piece around that is the affordability.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. You have two minutes.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm so glad that the government was so upset in my first 10 minutes of comments. I thank them for that. They were pretty negative on a lot of people that I quoted, so I guess they don't agree with anything the CFIB said, the hotel, motel and restaurant association—I could name many more quotes from many more organizations that are opposed to this. I ask their indulgence to make sure that when they are supposedly hearing from the public, they take into account these organizations that I mentioned, the people who tell me the impact on the ground.

I want to bring the point and the fact that besides it being a tax on employers of 1.9% that they have to find, it's a tax on take-home pay. So it's 1.9% off their paycheque, which most people can't afford. There's no question it's a double-whammy.

Should we do better education, getting people to plan for their retirement? Yes, we should. But a large majority of people in some areas of my riding struggle, as I say, to pay the hydro bill and the food bill. But you have to put out that there are other vehicles, if you have money, to set aside for retirement. The Registered Retirement Savings Plan is a venue to save for your retirement. You now have the tax-free savings account. I'm just going to mention the two. There are many vehicles that, if people had money to put away for their retirement, are there for them.

If they have money left when they pass on, that actually goes to their estate and to their family. When you create a government pension plan, that money is gone—that is, into the big pot. This way, people can choose the vehicle—and there are tax vehicles for pensions, for savings, for their retirement. They are out there; they can be used. The government does not need to create an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. That is, as my colleagues have said, a double-whammy, both on the employer and the employee, if you're lucky enough to have a job.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've got to say that I completely oppose what the Tories are saying in this debate. To say that every citizen in this province, including, I would argue, members of this assembly—that it should be up to them to decide how they're going to invest their dollars for retirement and that is going to make the problem of adequate retirement income going away, is a fallacy. I will argue that—out of 107 members in this assembly, how many people are able to retire at age 55—please put up your hand—with your own investments? How many of you can actually afford to retire at age 60?

The reality is we don't have a pension plan here in Ontario as MPPs. Most people don't know that. We're RRSP-based, and the reality is the money that we have in RRSPs has not done well. We've had years where we've made a few dollars on our investments, but we've had years where we've lost all those dollars of investment. Essentially, you've pretty well got the money that you put in; you really have not made any interest over the last 20 years that I've been in that plan. It's the money that I've put in that's still there—because I made some, I lost some, and when you balance it all out, you're lucky if you get 2%, 3% on average per year—if you're lucky.

What I find really ironic in this whole thing is that it's Conservative members who cancelled the Ontario pension plan for MPPs, but it is also Conservatives who are lobbying, trying to reinstate a defined pension plan for people in this province. So what is good for members should be good for the public.

I believe the best way to provide income for people in retirement is by having a defined pension plan. If you have a defined pension plan, you know what you're going to get at retirement, month in and month out; you're able to plan with your family, your spouse, what it is you're going to do in retirement and what you can afford to do. You're not left to the whim of the market and you're not

left to the whim of your own budgeting. Because the reality is that most people do not budget for retirement. Most people are more concerned about the here and now, and say, “You know what? I’ve got a truck that broke down,” or “I have a water heater that’s busted at home,” or “I’ve got braces to buy for my children,” or “I’ve got to pay for a college or university education.” Those are the things that we as families and as parents have to deal with on a day-to-day basis for the majority of the time that we’re in the workplace. It’s just called trying to make ends meet.

So most families and, I would argue, 90% to 95% of us, don’t have the ability to say, “Well, you know what? I can put \$1,500 a month away, so that I have enough money to be able to retire at age 55, in my own pension plan.” Because that’s about what you’d have to put away. If you start working at age, let’s say, 20, and you can put away \$1,500 a month until age 55, you might have enough to retire on. But nobody can afford that because, quite frankly, most people are not working for that kind of money. The majority of people in our society are working for \$50,000 and \$70,000 a year, if they’re lucky. That’s why it’s always better that we have a mechanism through the payroll, that there is a defined pension plan that says, “When you work, a percentage of your income is going to go, along with a contribution from your employer, to be able to provide a defined pension plan so that when you retire,” at whatever the plan allows, 57, 60, 55 or whatever it might be, “you know you’re going to get so much money per month to be able to plan for your own retirement,” pure and simple.

We as New Democrats, under Andrea Horwath, who brought, I believe, the first such bill into the Legislature, introduced the concept of getting the federal government to increase the CPP so that the Canada Pension Plan becomes a defined pension plan for all of us who don’t have a pension plan at work, and allow those who have a pension at work, like teachers and others, to opt out. If the federal government is not prepared to do it, what we said was that then Ontario should go on its own, but that’s not our first option.

Our first option has always been that we should get the federal government to accept that we have some mechanism to increase the contribution to CPP so that rather than retiring on a meagre income on your Canada Pension Plan, it would be somewhat sufficient to be able to provide for retirement.

I’ll just talk about my own situation. I make a good buck. I make 130,000-some-odd dollars a year as a member here and being a House leader. The employer, the Ontario government, puts about \$1,000 a month into my RRSPs, right? That’s what I’ve got to retire on. It is not sufficient for me to retire at anything before age 65. So the only thing I have to look forward to—and I’m not complaining; I’ve had it pretty good.

The point I’m making is this: Most people, if they wait until age 65, with the current CPP, and they don’t take the early retirement provision at age 60, are lucky if they’re going to get \$900 a month. On top of that, they

will get their old age pension, and if they’re lucky their spouse is the same age or a little bit older and you will get the old age pension and CPP from their spouse as well. Put all that together and you’re lucky, collectively, if you are making \$2,500 a month, in my particular case. Most people are having to survive on that and less.

0930

I look at my community, and I’m sure every member of this assembly has the same story. A husband and wife retired; they retired on whatever pension arrangement they had. The husband dies, and the wife is left alone. More times than not, she has to sell the house because she can’t afford to pay to keep the house going on what’s left when it comes to income from CPP death benefits and her own old age pension. So the widow is trying to survive.

Most people don’t have pensions. I look at the mining sector that I come out of, out of Timmins. Most of our mines did not have adequate defined pension plans. So those widows whose husbands died because of the work they did in these mines—they banged up their bodies or lungs and everything else—are having to retire, after the husband dies, and try to live on a CPP death benefit, which is about \$400 or \$500 a month, and their old age pension. They can’t afford to keep the house going with \$1,200 a month of income, even though the house is paid and clear, so what I see is that most of them are selling off their houses in order to have a little bit of equity so they can afford to do something with their grandkids and have a little bit of comfort in their days of retirement.

So, yes, we need to up the Canada Pension Plan in some way, and if that’s not possible, then, yes, we need to do something in order to provide a first step towards providing retirement income for people. If we leave it to the individual, as the Conservatives suggest, it will always be the same, and, I will argue, it’s not even the top 10% but probably the top 5% of Ontarians, who have money, who will retire with a good income. The rest of us won’t. It will be at the whim of the market, whatever we have in RRSPs.

I look at a good friend of mine who lives a couple of cottages over from me. The guy had about \$600,000 in RRSPs. At the last crash—remember the big one we had?—the value of his retirement pension was devalued by half. Guess what he did? He panicked and sold out, so he ended up with only half of what he was hoping to retire on, and that’s what he has to survive on for the rest of his days. He did what the Conservatives suggested. He put money into his RRSPs, his own money. Every year, he put money into his RRSPs. He tried to provide for a retirement income. When the market crashed and he lost half of the value, he did what other people did: panicked and sold his investments. He’s left with very little money to retire on. Now he’s chewing that up at a pretty fast rate, and all he is left with is his meagre Canada pension, his old age pension, and his wife’s old age pension and a very small CPP, because she only worked for about 10 years.

I disagree with the Conservatives on this one. I think that defined pension plans are the way to go, because at

least that way, people are able to know that when they retire, there will be a decent pension for them in their retirement years.

We are lucky. If we work in the public sector, most of us have a decent pension, except for members of this assembly: nurses, teachers, workers in the civil service. If you work for one of the larger employers in Ontario, like Ford or Falconbridge or any of those big companies, you probably have a decent private pension plan with your employer that was negotiated with your union. But the rest of us, which is, I would say, about 65% or 70%, worked for mom-and-pop operations or medium-sized businesses or were self-employed, and we don't have any mechanism to be able to provide for a pension.

Is this pension plan that the government is putting forward perfect? Absolutely not. I think there are things that we're going to want to talk about, once we go to committee, about how we're able to change it in some ways to make it a better thing for those people who retire. But it is a step in the right direction. It's something that Andrea Horwath advocated for for years before she became leader, and I know my friend Paul Miller, who is our critic, did the same, and it's something that we talked about over a couple of elections. The government is moving in that direction. That's fine; it doesn't matter where the idea comes from. The fact is, we're stepping out in that direction.

Can it be better? Absolutely. But I'd just ask the Tories: Let's stop this fallacy that if we only allowed people to provide for themselves, everything would be better. Look at the United States when it comes to their health care system. If you don't have an employer with a plan, you don't have health care, and it's the same when it comes to pensions.

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: I share many of the views on Bill 56, the establishment of the Ontario pension plan, that have been articulated by the member from Timmins–James Bay.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. I've taken the opportunity to review Hansard from the federal Parliament in 1963, 1964 and 1965, when then-Prime Minister Pearson, with the assistance of Mr. Douglas and others—because it was a minority Parliament—when the Canada pension debate came forward. It's interesting when I hear the members opposite, the official opposition. You can close your eyes and you can hear John Diefenbaker, George Hees, Davie Fulton. The same tired arguments that were made in 1963, 1964 and 1965 are being made again. I tell the members, take a look at them. They're great speeches, and they should deliver them.

It's interesting; it's interesting.

Interjections.

Hon. Jeff Leal: This has to go to committee. I think the quicker we get it to committee and bring people in to provide commentary on this will be very important.

It's interesting that when the Canada Pension Plan was finally passed, in 1965, it was the fifth version of that plan.

Mr. Pearson, the Prime Minister of the day, sent it to the parliamentary committee on finance. They heard delegations from coast to coast to coast, and came up with the plan, which was the fifth version.

This is all about philosophy, Mr. Speaker. It's about individual rights versus collective rights, and moving a society forward together. That's exactly what this pension plan does. It means we're going to provide for generations down the road, so that they have an adequate pension.

In fact, you would think the CFIB would be interested in that, because if you put more disposable income in people's pockets, they buy things.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm going to try to loop this back to the speaker who had 10 minutes, the member from Timmins–James Bay. He laid out a scenario that I'd like to expand upon.

The individual husband works all of his life. Let's scenario it out that he actually pays into the ORPP. Then he and his spouse retire. Then, unfortunately, the main earner dies. In this scenario, with the ORPP, there is no money for the spouse. That is the big difference between the ability to put money into your RRSP and the ability to put money into the ORPP.

What we're trying to explain—why we keep standing up and debating this topic is because there is a difference, and people have to understand. You could pay in your 1.9% off your paycheque for 40 years, and if you die the day after you retire, that money goes nowhere except to the government. Okay? That's the difference.

You have a system right now where your estate, your family, your charitable choice is getting the assets that you've acquired. Under the ORPP, the only person who gets the assets is the Liberal government.

Call me a little cynical, but I think the vast majority of Ontarians do not look at the Ontario government as great managers of our money.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to comment on our House leader, the member for Timmins–James Bay. He gave some important points of reference in terms of what we experience here under our pension plan and how wholly inadequate it is, in terms of providing real security and the ability to retire comfortably, which is, I think, what Ontarians want. They want a vehicle to be able to know that their money is being properly managed and invested, and that the return on the back side, when they do retire, will be adequate for the ever-increasing cost of living each and every day in the province of Ontario, which the government has a whole lot to do with. Whether it be energy prices or otherwise, it's getting more and more expensive, and I would guess that it will continue to be.

It's interesting to hear a member from the PC caucus rail against any type of vehicle or mechanism for retirement security. I would imagine that they would rely solely on the free hand of the market to dictate and to provide that mechanism.

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We heard just recently that some in their caucus don't believe in evolution, which is interesting, although they do believe in one of the aspects of Darwin's theory of evolution, which is natural selection, whereby the strong will survive, and by that I would imagine they believe that the rich will survive because they are then in fact the strongest. If that's the type of society we're trying to create here, where the more money you have the better off you're going to be, regardless of intervention or any type of effort on the part of the government, then we are indeed doomed to lower the standard of living in this province.

I would say, let's put our best minds forward. Let's put best practices forward. In fact, we know they exist in the CPP—very great returns, a strong plan and low, low administrative fees. The model is there. I hope the government takes on that model and champions it through this legislation.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: The member for Timmins–James Bay has, I think, outlined very clearly what the positives are about this particular proposal for a pension plan, an Ontario pension plan. I don't think there's anybody in the House who would not prefer to have the federal government take up its responsibility through the Canada Pension Plan and enhance it. There's a lot of support for that throughout the country.

What it does is it allows people of a modest income to have the opportunity to be able to participate in a pension plan so that when they retire they will have the chance to live a life they were looking forward to, rather than some who have to struggle and stay on for many years beyond what they had hoped to in terms of retirement or have to certainly scale way back on their living style because of the fact that they don't have an adequate pension plan. Now, we recognize that people just about to retire are not the ones who are going to necessarily benefit from this. But we have to look down the line at those who have to.

There have been many good speeches in the House on this. I think we've had about 10 hours of debate on this and they've been very valuable. The contributions that people have made have been valuable even though they become repetitive after a while; that's natural when a debate of this kind is going on. I'm glad to see about 63 members have spoken on this at the present time.

What I would like to see happening—I'm a great fan of committees. As we go to committee, I would like to say that we should have a good committee session taking place. I think there would be a lot of representations made by those who have a specific interest and some expertise who would come forward, and also there would be an opportunity to have amendments.

I think the member from Timmins–James Bay has made a compelling case for a pension plan, and I certainly urge members of the Legislature—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

The member from Timmins–James Bay, you have a two-minute response.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, let me thank everybody for their comments and just end on this: It's rather unfortunate, the rules we have in this House, that as a member I'm only afforded 10 minutes to speak because the standing orders say that after six and a half hours we drop from 20 minutes down to 10. It's unfortunate, because at times—and I find myself in that position now—we have a number of members who wanted to speak. As a House leader, I want to make sure my people get their opportunity. It's not always about the leadership speaking; you have to allow your members to participate fully. But it means that somebody gets short shrift down the road.

There are times when you legitimately have a debate about a bill that you'd like to have because there are things that I would have liked to have talked about that I didn't get a chance because I only had 10 minutes. Now, I'll be afforded the opportunity, I guess, to go to committee and put those thoughts at committee, hopefully by way of amendment. But I think it truly speaks to the problems that we have with the whole concept of having time allocation in the standing orders and the whole concept of limiting speeches to a degree.

I don't think we can ever go back to what it was when I was here, where Mr. Bradley, the member for St. Catharines, would take the floor in opposition and speak for two days at a time because he was an eloquent speaker and he had things to say. But I do think that limiting to 10 minutes after six and a half hours is problematic and I think it's something that at one point I hope the government could see its way of looking at: How do you afford members the ability to have their say legitimately in debate, in order to make whatever we're doing here legislatively a better bill when it comes out of second reading and, finally, out of third?

The only other thing that I'll say is, I think history has proven that the best system for people to be able to have retirement income has always been a mandatory pension system at work. That way, you're able to provide.

To say that every citizen in Ontario is able to provide for their own, if they had the opportunity—first of all, a lot don't have the opportunity, and some people just won't do it because they're doing other things.

Let's see where this brings us.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me. I'm very honoured to speak on Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan—

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, a point of order.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm just very reluctant, now that I see the government House leader speaking—just for your benefit, I want to remind you of two standing orders. One is standing order 14, which disallows out-of-order mo-

tions. I've had 19 members of my caucus who still want to speak to this bill. Nineteen members haven't spoken. I just want you to realize, in case the minister talks about rule 23(c), "Repetition," that there has been no repetition on our side—so, 14 and 23(c).

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I hear you clearly, but it's not a point of order.

Minister?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. Some precious time got taken on things that I want to talk about, because this is a very important issue. This legislation would help create a savings tool for the people of our province, and it is designed to give people a secure floor they can rely on.

Speaker, I can assure you that in the last provincial election—that was less than a year ago, in May and June—this was an issue that was clearly articulated in our campaign platform. The need to have retirement income security, the need to create an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, was front and centre of our campaign. In fact, our Premier, while campaigning, spoke to this issue on many, many occasions. It was a commitment we made to the people of Ontario, that if we were re-elected as their government, we would bring in, by 2017, an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

I don't need to remind you that during that campaign, or as a result of that election, the people of Ontario gave us a very strong majority mandate to act on our commitments, one of the big ones being the creation of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

I can also share with you, Speaker, from my own experience in my own community of Ottawa Centre, that this is an issue that I had an opportunity to discuss many, many times with my constituents. From visiting constituents door to door to debates within the community to coffee meetings, this was an issue that came up often. A majority of my constituents support the creation of an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.

Many people told me that the best way to deal with this is actually to enhance the CPP, the Canada Pension Plan, and I totally agree with them. I totally agree with them. I think this is the best way to ensure that we have retirement income security for hard-working Canadians who do not have a workplace pension plan, like the members here in this House, and who should benefit from an enhanced CPP. The Canada Pension Plan already exists, and we know that system works. But we also know that at the current level the CPP exists, it does not pay well. It does not allow somebody who will retire to live with dignity. The best way to address that situation, that circumstance, is by enhancing the CPP.

We know that there has been a complete abdication of responsibility from this current federal government. They do not want to address that very important issue, even though we've got near unanimity across the country, among all Premiers, that they want to ensure, they want to see, some sort of enhancement of the CPP.

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But we've seen again and again and again the federal government, the Prime Minister and the finance minister

standing in the way of having a secure retirement income. So it does not leave us any choice. It does not leave us any choice but to move forward with the creation of an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan so that we are able to look after hard-working Ontarians who do not have the opportunity to save enough now, so that when they retire, they have sufficient income security.

The other point I make, Speaker, is that it helps us as a society. If those people do not have the means to live in a secure way in their retirement, who is going to help them? It will be us, the state. We would have to help them, because this is the kind of compassionate society we are. We have a social safety network in this province and in this country, thankfully. We will not let those people go homeless. We will not let them go to food banks. We would have to do something. The cost of dealing with this issue later on, when those people are struggling or suffering, is going to be much higher than not taking action now. If we take action now, if we create this Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, we are going to be able to help a lot of people and save future costs.

Speaker, this is an important bill. As we know, we introduced this bill in December, as per our commitment. We have allowed debate on this bill to continue. We have reached six and a half hours of debate so that more members would have an opportunity to present their views on the bill. This bill has seen over 10 hours of debate and, according to my last count, we have had 64 MPPs who have spoken to this bill. There has been considerable debate on this bill, and we have heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives.

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: There are four members of my caucus who haven't spoken to that bill. They're sitting here in the House waiting to speak to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That is not a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker.

As I said, there has been considerable debate. We've heard many points of view. It is time that we end second reading and take this bill to committee. Let's have all our stakeholders come in and engage in a meaningful conversation—to hear from Ontarians from across the province on this very important bill. In committee, members will have the opportunity to speak, of course, and to hear from constituents, from stakeholders, from partners, from the province, and, of course, have the opportunity to move amendments to the bill.

At the same time, this House can move to substantive debate on other matters. There are a number of important pieces of legislation that are already introduced, which the government would like to debate in the House and move through the legislative process: things like Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 9, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act; Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act; Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act; Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act; Bill 49, the On-

tario Immigration Act; and Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act.

We'd like to spend time debating some of the other important pieces of legislation currently before the House, but we cannot until Bill 56 is dealt with. As a result, Speaker, I move that this question now be put.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Given the duration of the debate to this point and the number of members who have been able to participate, I'm going to allow the motion.

Mr. Naqvi has moved that the question now be put.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This vote will be taken during deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

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

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 18, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 49, Loi portant sur l'immigration en Ontario et apportant une modification connexe à la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the members from Northumberland–Quinte West, Durham, and Mississauga–Streetsville.

I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. I'd like to say a few words about my community of Ottawa South, where I've lived all my life and have seen it change over some 50 years.

I come from a community that's wonderfully and beautifully diverse. You can see it when you go into our schools. Often I go into schools, when we're back during constituency weeks and on Fridays, and our schools are just a beautiful cultural mosaic. I think that we have in Ottawa South 140 different nationalities and over 70 languages, and you can see that in the schools. Ottawa South is also home to one of Canada's largest Arabic-speaking populations. That happened through waves of immigration. It began 50, 60 years ago. There are many Lebanese immigrants who have built businesses and built up our community.

Actually, one of my predecessors in this seat, Dalton McGuinty Sr., had a saying. He didn't like the term "new Canadian." He said there are only new, newer and newest Canadians. What that meant is, this country was built on

immigration. That's what our strength is. We've brought the world together. That's how we've built the community of Ottawa South; that's how we've built Canada.

I'm pleased to support the changes that are in this bill. Of course, the overriding importance of this bill is its potential for economic benefit to our province. As a shared jurisdiction with the federal government, on immigration, they've made some recent changes. Bill 49, if passed, would include a vision and objectives for immigration to Ontario; authority to establish and govern Ontario immigration selection programs; authority to establish and govern settlement and integration programs; authority to set targets for Ontario selection programs; authority to establish employer and recruiter registries; a compliance and enforcement regime; authority to directly or indirectly collect, use and disclose personal information to maintain program integrity and deter immigration fraud in Ontario selection programs.

Now I'd like to speak to one of the changes in this bill, which is the amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act to align requirements in the RHPA with those in the Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act related to the timelines in decision-making and access to records. These changes were requested by the Fairness Commissioner.

I think we have all experienced in our communities people coming to our offices, or people that we meet at events, who have come to our country and have been trained as teachers, as nurses, as doctors, as engineers. They have made the effort to acquire these skills—another jurisdiction has supported them in acquiring these skills—but they can't find work in their chosen field, in the thing they have decided to do with their life. We feel for people, because we understand how we would feel if we were in that position, if we were not able to use all our skills to the fullest extent of our abilities. There's kind of a moral and ethical thing when you see that. You say, "That's not just."

The other thing that we have to consider is, it's in our economic self-interest to support people who have skills that have been acquired and paid for in another jurisdiction, and all we need to do is either recognize those skills or help them get to the standards that we have here in our country. So I think this change in the bill is very important. It's something I feel very, very strongly about, not only from the perspective of being fair to people but from the perspective that it's an economic benefit to our province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Northumberland–Quinte West.

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Mr. Lou Rinaldi: This particular piece of legislation, once we debate it and pass it—I think it has somewhat of a special meaning for me.

I'm an immigrant, Speaker. I was 12 years old. As of almost two weeks ago, 55 years ago, we landed in Halifax, so if one does the math, you know how old I am. My father came in 1959. My mother, my sister and I came in 1960.

We are so delighted—my family is; I'm sure other families across this province are—that not only Ontario but Canada has adopted us as Canadians. Shortly after, as soon we could qualify to become Canadians, we all became Canadians, all four of us.

It's not that I don't cherish my heritage, because I think heritage is very, very important. That's where I was born, and, obviously, there are lots of ties. I still have a lot of relatives in my hometown where I was born.

Whenever I get an opportunity to talk about immigration, certainly it has got that side of me. I'm not pretending. As I speak, I'm living the vision.

Back then, immigrants gathered around large urban centres. Frankly, at that time, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, a lot of immigrants were of the construction type of immigrant, who worked very hard to build Ontario to what it is today. I remember my father—then, the labour laws weren't as they are today. That's not to say that workplaces where he worked took advantage of him. Certainly, they did the best they could.

For Ontario and Canada, immigration has become a staple. I think places like Ontario, like large urban centres, depend on immigration. It's sort of a leaning post to an economic driver. It's part of what drives our economy.

Today, I see immigration is much different than it was then. Then, as I said a minute ago, immigration centred around large urban centres—the Torontos, the Ottawas of this world—but today, immigration is spreading its wings. For example, in the riding of Northumberland—Quinte West, Northumberland county is a portal, where potential immigrants who want to come to Ontario now have a place to explore the beautiful Northumberland county, with its seven municipalities. The city of Quinte West—I had a good chat with them just after the election in June. Obviously, they're looking for immigration to expand their well-being.

I guess what I'm saying is that immigration has become more and more of a staple, as part of our economic drivers.

We know that immigration is the responsibility of the federal government; I think we all know that. But I think we need to be able to create, with this piece of legislation, what's important to us here, to make sure that as we get into the selection process, we get the type of immigration that will work well for Ontario—and not to be selfish. When I talk about what has to work well for Ontario, and part of that Ontario mix, it's those immigrants. In the immigration piece, for any immigrants who want to make Ontario their home, we want to make a special place where they feel at home.

It's challenging. Sometimes I wonder, for example, what made my mother and father decide to come to Canada. It was obviously for a better life for them, but also for my sister and I, and we're so, so grateful for that.

We've got to make sure that we have a piece of legislation at the end of the day that makes that transition as smooth as possible; that makes sure these immigrants who come to this great province, and this great country,

land in a place they can call home, because we all want to feel at home at the end of the day.

Speaker, I would say to you that, as we debate this, I'm going to certainly pay close attention to make sure it hits those marks that are needed.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, this obviously needs debate. Hopefully, we keep in mind also that we don't use this as a political ploy, as we did with some other pieces of legislation, to just hold things up, because there are people who want to come to Ontario. There are people who want to call Ontario home.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Durham.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I'm honoured to speak to this debate.

Immigration is vital to Ontario's success and growth. Ensuring that it's accountable and sustainable for current and future Ontarians is extremely important. Our demographics are slowly changing, and the Ontario of today owes itself, in large part, to the wonderful people who choose to call Ontario their new home. We must make sure that our province remains a viable option for people from around the world, and we must make sure that we are welcoming to those who want to bring their families here.

There are many difficulties faced by those who wish to immigrate to any part of this country. Much of that comes from the seemingly simple task of establishing yourself with a place to live and a place to work. There are usually many hurdles and hoops that one must jump through in order to achieve this legally and effectively. Offering programs for foreign nationals who wish to come here to work is an excellent way to re-evaluate how we help to welcome new Ontarians and new Canadians.

Giving them the opportunity to move more easily through the transitional period will give them more of a footing when they settle here and will give them a better chance at making a lasting effort to stay and become citizens.

Employers who employ foreign nationals will also benefit, in that they will have a streamlined way through the government to provide and offer working opportunities in a consistent and centralized way. This should make it easier for them to coordinate the process.

Of utmost importance are, of course, accountability and transparency. I am glad to see that the ministry is taking this into account. Providing for the inspection and investigation of new programs will be vital to ensuring, to those who participate in them, that the process is fair to existing Ontarians, who deserve to have faith in the system. Of even greater impact is the provision for appealing selection decisions, and giving a voice to those who may wish to become Ontarians, but feel they have missed their opportunity and wish to have their case heard.

Navigating the immigration process throughout our country is a joint effort. It is reassuring to know that we are doing our part as a province to make it work for those who wish to become Canadians. Working with the gov-

ernments of Canada and of our fellow provinces and territories is necessary, but we must also ensure that the process is fair and equitable to Ontario and to all Ontarians. It is reassuring to know that our minister is taking the steps required to make sure that this is a reality.

Ontario is one of the greatest provinces in this country, although you might not hear that from the opposition. They try to tear Ontario down at every instance, but, as a government, our effort is to build Ontario up. That's what we're doing. Building Ontario up is welcoming new immigrants who can provide new skills to this great province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a pleasure to stand up and to join this particular debate, to talk about a natural resource that exists everywhere in the world but disproportionately chooses Canada.

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As you read the news, you think to yourself: Gosh, it's awfully gloomy everywhere else in the world and it seems like people are giving up hope in the country in which they were born. But they're finding that very hope by coming to this country and this province and this region of this province.

In Ontario, when we talk about revising our policies and procedures regarding immigration, it's because that's one of the engines that has helped build Ontario. We are now the elephant in the room in terms of population and economy. We're the biggest entity in the entire industrial heartland of North America, the Great Lakes and the Midwestern states. There is no state or province with more people in it than Ontario. There is no economy larger than that in Ontario.

A large part of what has made Ontario the economic engine of the heartland of North America has been the new Canadians who have arrived from all over the world with the capacity to do business everywhere in the world. We speak every language in the world. We understand the world's customs. We know what the world needs. Moreover, when we talk about the process of attracting the best talent from everywhere in the world, of teaching them how to become passionate Canadians, of having them build our communities, we do it better than anywhere else in the world.

I was just reading the—

Applause.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you.

I was reading an article in the current edition of *Foreign Affairs*, a US publication. It was talking about the multicultural experience in Europe and the degree to which they were having problems with it. It brought back to mind some of the time I spent chairing the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly. Speaker, I know you've chaired this committee, so you can probably share this experience. We would have our incoming delegations from wherever and, along with the Speaker, the Chair of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly would be invited to lunch, to sit down with the elected

members from—fill in the blanks, because they came from everywhere in the world.

They would walk around downtown Toronto and they would say, "We are just blown over by the diversity here in the province of Ontario." And they would ask questions: "How do you go about doing this? How do we deal with attracting the best talent?" Then, the most important part, the settlement and integration: How do we enable new Canadians to get on with their lives so that there isn't the generation that comes from the old country, regardless of what the old country is, that has to be a lost generation? We know that the priorities of the generation that comes from the old country are pretty simple: Restart your career, get a place to live, get your kids in school and allow your family life to continue to go forward. At those lunches, we would talk about how we go about settlement and integration.

Inevitably, whoever was leading the delegation would often turn to me and say, "We could never do that where we come from." That's something that Ontario uniquely has in the world. It has been one of our big drivers in making us the most sought-after, the most prosperous place in North America. We can do that where we come from. We can take people who come from everywhere, who refer to the Almighty in every faith on the planet, who speak every language, who know every skill and trade. We can turn all of those people into part of our Ontario family within the same generation that they arrive. That's what we're here to do and do better.

The first thing this new Ontario Immigration Act seeks to do is to have a broader conversation, to say, even though we do this better than anywhere else in the world, let's talk about that vision and objective so that we can keep doing this better than anywhere else in the world. That's probably, more than anything else, the most important thing to do, because if we're going to look at that horizon, it would be nice to say, "Let's know what horizon we're sailing toward." That's something that's just a key part of this bill.

It also seeks to refine some of the laws and procedures that enable Ontario to select the best-quality newcomers and to be able to govern policies and procedures regarding settlement and integration. This is something that's done unevenly. The federal government is absolutely hopeless in its programs for settlement and integration. It is just wretched, and there's no better place to see that than in my home area of Peel region—at some of the money that is completely wasted by the federal government. We can do a lot better on this. Among the other things in this is the authority to set targets for Ontario's selection program.

Speaker, I could do with a lot more time. I'm just getting warmed up, but I'm out of time. Before you cut me off, I just want to thank you for the opportunity.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. Seeing the time on the clock, this House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: I have at least two nurses here with RNAO. I've got Denise Wood from Gananoque in Leeds county and I have Jean Lambert from Bishops Mills in Grenville county. Welcome, nurses, to Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'ai de la grande visite aujourd'hui. Directement de Nickel Belt, on a M^{me} Lise Thomas et également le seul et unique Paul-André Gauthier, qui est avec l'Association des infirmières et infirmiers autorisés de l'Ontario. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

I also have a long list of visitors in the gallery, starting with: Stephanie Blaney; Una Ferguson; Janet Hunt; Claudette Holloway; the one and only Nathan Kelly; Patricia Sevean; Paula Manuel; Denise Wood; and Carol Timmings. All are members of the RNAO. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm also pleased to welcome members of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario to the Legislature this morning for their annual Queen's Park day. I know there are a number of registered nurses joining us in the members' gallery as well as in the public galleries, but I want to especially welcome Doris Grinspun, the CEO of RNAO; Vanessa Burkoski, the president of RNAO; and Rhonda Seidman-Carlson, the past president of RNAO. They have a great day planned for all of us. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As is usually what happens when we have a large group of visitors, I'm going to ask that we get through these as quickly as possible. I'm not going to say that I'll do it as a blanket, because that didn't work the last time, but I am going to ask members to be very brief with their introductions, and no editorials.

The member from Whitby-Oshawa.

Ms. Christine Elliott: I'd also like to welcome the members from RNAO to Queen's Park today, and specifically welcome Stephanie Blaney, Una Ferguson, Janet Hunt, Claudette Holloway, Nathan Kelly and Angela Cooper Brathwaite. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome Dianne Roedding from the Rainbow Nursing Interest Group membership executive today. Welcome to Queen's Park, Dianne.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to welcome to the Legislative Assembly today from the RNAO Thunder Bay delegation Michelle Spadoni, Carine Gallagher, Dawna-Marie Perry and Pat Sevean. Both my colleague Michael Gravelle and I were able to have breakfast with them this morning. We welcome them to Queen's Park.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to recognize Megan Herron from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

I'd also like to give a shout-out to Minister Mauro, who was a class act and comported himself as I think we all should last night at the Osgoode conference.

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm absolutely thrilled and pleased to welcome some members of the RNAO from

Hamilton today. We have Irene Molinar, Darlene Shernet and Leighanne Swance. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: It gives me great pleasure to introduce the family of one of our page captains, William Stuart, from the great riding of Kitchener-Centre. I would ask them to stand. They are: Dr. Christine Purdon; father Charles Stuart; big sister Mary Stuart, who also served as a page; grandmother Sylvia Purdon; cousin Laura Purdon; and godmother Mary Purdon. Welcome.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to welcome Fiona Proctor and Cindy Baker-Barill to Queen's Park as members of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. We're very proud of them.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to welcome Chloé Robert, trustee with Conseil scolaire Viamonde. Welcome to the Legislature.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm very pleased and proud to welcome to the House today members of the Halton chapter of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, and in particular from my riding Karimah Alidina, Halton chapter president. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce Cheryl Yost, a neighbour of mine from the Monkton area, here with RNAO.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have a nurse here as well. I'm delighted to welcome Paul Koniec, who works at CAMH.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I'd like to introduce to the Legislature today, once again, Mary Purdon, who is actually one of my constituents and works here at Queen's Park for the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. She's here with her family to see her nephew, William Stuart, who is the page captain here today. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'd like to recognize Linda Holm from the RNAO and thank her for the invitation to breakfast this morning.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to introduce five members of the RNAO from the Windsor area who are in the gallery this morning: Debbie Kane, Kelly Lawrenson, Dana Boyd, Ore Ayo-Olaniyan and Jennifer Johnston, who is celebrating a birthday today. Welcome to question period this morning.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'd like to welcome members from the Peel region RNAO: Jennifer Bintakies and Maria Harrison. Thank you for joining us.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce, from my local RNAO chapter, Katie Wright. I'm sorry I missed breakfast, but I've talked to Katie. Katie, if you're here, welcome.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would like to introduce Barbara Hall, chief commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. Barbara's husband, Max, is here, I think, and there are a number of her commissioners here. Welcome.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I would like to welcome from OREA, the Ontario Real Estate Association, Adam Yahn and Brian Graham.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Ottawa caucus, to introduce a group that we had the pleasure of meeting this morning with the RNAO: Mrs. Cecile Diby, Sandra Stec, Alwyn Moyer and Una Ferguson.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have the pleasure of introducing Nathalie DiLabio from SD&G, my riding. She attends St. Lawrence College and is the president of the nursing students association. Welcome.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I just want to recognize Katherine Dunford of the RNAO. I had the opportunity to sit with her for breakfast this morning.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to welcome three constituents from London West: Janet Hunt and Pam Bushell from RNAO; and Laura Vita, a nursing student from Western.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to welcome members of the Halton chapter of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario this morning. Here with us today are Leanne Siracusa and Krystle Prior. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: On behalf of Kingston and the Islands, I welcome, from the RNAO, Megan Laan and nursing student Yessica Rivera Belsham. Welcome.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'd like to welcome to the Legislature today Julie Rubel, who is an RNAO member from St. Catharines.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I would like to welcome Lynn Anne Mulrooney and Cathy Lacroix, and also the members of the RNAO environment committee, for the great work they're doing on climate change and on toxins.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd just like to welcome the RNAO delegation from Etobicoke Centre. There are three constituents, two of whom I met this morning: Angela De Guzman, Taissa Pavliuc and Ingrid Drescher. Thank you for coming.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I would like to welcome the members of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario who are with us today. I enjoyed having breakfast with Hilda, who I've known for a very long time, and with nursing student Linna Feng—I want to give a particular welcome to her, and also to Maggie Sicilia, from York South–Weston.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I would like to introduce commissioners from the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal who are here with Chief Commissioner Barbara Hall: Ruth Goba, Fernand Lalonde, Julie Lee, Lawrence McDermott, Errol Mendes, Fiona Sampson, Bhagat Taggar and the executive director, Dianne Carter. Welcome to Queen's Park.

1040

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I just wanted to take this opportunity to introduce the members of the RNAO from my riding with whom I had breakfast this morning, from my riding: Carmen, Sonya, Claudette and a student, Llanto.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I understand, Speaker, one of our model parliamentarians has come back for a second round and he happens to be my constituent Brian Hopkins, from Guelph.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I would like to welcome a constituent of mine, Bhagat Taggar, who is here, and also all of the members of the RNAO from Scarborough–Guildwood.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker, for giving me some good exercise today of getting up and down, up and down; it's great.

Two quick introductions: First I want to recognize again Professor Errol Mendes, who is a commissioner of human rights. He's a former professor of law of mine from the University of Ottawa and a constituent. Professor Mendes, welcome to Queen's Park.

Also, on behalf of the member from Eglinton–Lawrence, I want to welcome the family of page captain Arlyne James: her father, George James; grandfather Bill James; and uncle Paul James, who are in the members' gallery. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to introduce two members of the RNAO from Sault Ste. Marie: Stephanie Blaney and Jennifer Flood. Welcome to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? My goodness, we got them.

I too would like to welcome the members from the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario from my riding and thank them for the breakfast.

Also, we have with us today in the Speaker's gallery a delegation of members of Parliament and Deputy Speaker from Sweden. We welcome the members for their visit here and we thank them very much.

Applause.

USE OF PROPS IN THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I saw something this morning just before question period that I will be working on very quickly—I advise strongly against it—the use of props. If it happens, I'll deal with it immediately.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, you said, "I'm not going to force someone to resign in the face of allegations that I do not believe to be true." Well, Premier, Pat Sorbara's cousin, the former Minister of Finance, once said the following when he was named in a search warrant. He said, "While I have no idea as to what the allegations are or the facts on which they are based, my responsibility ... is to step aside." Premier, why should Pat Sorbara not be held to the same standard? Why shouldn't she have to step aside while two OPP investigations are ongoing?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much to the interim Leader of the Opposition for the question. He knows that I take this matter very seriously. He also knows that Greg Sorbara was an elected official and was

a minister of the crown. So he knows these are very different situations.

As I say, I've taken, and I do take, this matter very seriously. Elections Ontario determined that the allegations against me and the member for Sudbury were baseless, Mr. Speaker. We'll continue to co-operate fully, but I just remind the member opposite that this is an investigation that is not taking place in this Legislature. It's an investigation that's taking place outside the Legislature, and we will continue to work with the authorities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again to the Premier: Your Deputy Premier said that the Premier "will not force the resignation of someone when the allegations against that person are baseless...." Now, Premier, I need not remind you—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Who are you taking to the woodshed today?

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: —that that statement completely contradicts the findings of the Chief Electoral Officer. When a minister or Premier's office is under police investigation, former Minister Sorbara had wise words when he said, "Meanwhile it's appropriate for me to step aside from my responsibilities while the investigation occurs." Premier, why is it not appropriate for your deputy chief of staff to step aside? The media call her, next to yourself, the most powerful woman in the province of Ontario. She's as important as a cabinet minister, and probably makes more decisions than cabinet ministers in your government. So why is it not appropriate that she step aside?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's interesting to hear the commentary from the member opposite, which I think actually reveals more about how he sees government working than it does about how government works from our perspective.

I want to just remind the member opposite what the Chief Electoral Officer said. The Chief Electoral Officer 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." So, Mr. Speaker, the investigations are entirely independent. The Public Prosecution Service of Canada has been retained. We will continue to work with the authorities, but that investigation takes place outside of this House.

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

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again to the Premier: Your Deputy Premier has said that the Premier "has demonstrated a new and different and better way ... of dealing with opposition allegations." But the Chief Electoral Officer said that he has found a prima facie case of contravention of the Election Act, and he sent it on for further process and prosecution.

Premier, these are not "opposition allegations." These are findings of an independent officer of this Legislature. The investigation is not happening outside this Legis-

lature; in fact, it's happening just down the hall, in your office.

By continuing to stand by Pat Sorbara, you're embarrassing the office you hold and you are degrading the reputation of every elected member in this House, because people are starting to think this is simply business as usual. Mr. Speaker, this is Liberal business as usual.

Premier, will you finally have Ms. Sorbara step aside?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, while I've made repeated statements on this matter—I made a statement on Friday; I've answered questions in House—there's an investigation under way. I'll continue to co-operate with the process, but that process is entirely independent of government. It's independent of this House, and the member opposite knows that.

I understand the back-and-forth of question period. I understand it very well, but I really believe that accusing people of being criminals when there's an investigation going on is wrong. Just to remind the members opposite, what the electoral officer said is, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." So it is entirely inaccurate to say that the elections officer has made a finding in this case, Mr. Speaker. The electoral officer has left that to prosecutors and judges.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again to the Premier: The Ontario Civilian Police Commission has said that all police service board members "have an obligation to respect, uphold and follow the law. While this is true for every citizen, it is even more so for individuals who have the legislated responsibility for ensuring 'law enforcement and crime prevention' in their community."

Premier, as you ignore the calls for you to have Gerry Lougheed resign, you also ignore the higher standard that is expected of Mr. Lougheed as chair of the Sudbury police services board. So will you finally do the right thing and ask Gerry Lougheed to step aside?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated. Thank you. The interjections while I'm trying to get quiet are not acceptable.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said this, and I will say it again: We do not direct police services boards. They are responsible for the provision of adequate and effective police services in their municipalities. I understand—

Mr. Steve Clark: The minister can ask for an investigation. It's right there in the act.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds-Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:—that the Sudbury police services board addressed this issue and voted for Mr. Loughheed to remain, and they will continue to make the determinations that they see to be appropriate. The investigation is ongoing. We will continue to co-operate and we will work with the authorities, but that investigation is happening outside of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again to the Premier: The Ontario Civilian Police Commission says that members of police service boards have “a responsibility to conduct themselves with the ‘utmost circumspection and prudence’” and are expected to have “the highest levels of honesty and integrity,” and that this is most certainly the case for board chairs.

1050

Premier, while your appointee, Gerry Loughheed, is under two OPP investigations, his honesty and integrity are being called into question. I'll ask you: Don't you think the residents of Sudbury deserve, as chair of their police services board, a person who is above suspicion and held to the same standards to which other police services board members and board chairs are held?

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member opposite for the question.

I've spoken to this issue before. Police services boards are accountable to their local communities. That's why we have police services boards, so that they can provide oversight for the local police services, so that they can ensure they provide adequate and effective policing within their jurisdictions. That's why, as we have seen in the case of Sudbury, the local police services board, which is made up of both municipal and provincial appointees, has looked into the matter and decided to keep Mr. Loughheed as chair of the board. We should respect that decision of theirs.

If there needs to be any further looking into this matter, the Ontario Civilian Police Commission is very well equipped, as an arm's-length body, to look into the matter.

Interjection.

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

Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: To the Premier: The Ontario Civilian Police Commission has also said that “an obligation of the board to obey the law necessitates an effort to ensure the propriety of their actions when the question arises.” I think we can all agree in this House that the propriety of Mr. Loughheed's actions has arisen. In addition to Mr. Loughheed's normal responsibilities the board goes on to say he, or a board chair, “has a leadership role.”

Premier, you have a leadership role. Will you show some leadership, do the right thing, get rid of these bad apples, get rid of the person who's chairing the police services board in Sudbury, who is under suspicion? Just

clear the air, let the police do their job, let the courts do their job—let everyone have their day in court, and save your own reputation in the process.

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think the member is fully aware, and I've stated before in this House, there is a code of conduct that is put in place through regulation and it's up to the Ontario Civilian Police Commission, which has the responsibility to ensure that there are no breaches to the code of conduct. That is an appropriate process to have because it's at arm's-length from the government. The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services has no authority to suspend or remove a member of the police services board.

I suggest that the members in this House refrain from being judge and jury and everything in between and let the independent process, as we've said—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark, come to order—second time.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi:—through legislation, do their work.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier seems to think that Liberals did nothing wrong when Andrew Olivier was being offered a job. According to her convoluted logic, she seems to believe that what happened in Sudbury was actually noble, but when she's been asked who ordered this noble deed, she refuses to answer. It doesn't make sense. If she feels everything is okay, then there shouldn't be any problem whatsoever in answering the question: Who directed that Andrew Olivier be offered a job?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, as the member opposite knows, I challenge the premise of the question. I've said it many, many times. I take this situation very seriously.

There is an investigation going on, but that investigation is not going on in this House. It's going on with the authorities outside of the Legislature. We will continue to work with them. But I've said I take it seriously and we'll do everything in our power to work with the authorities and make sure they get all the information that they request.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier doesn't see any problems at all with offering Andrew Olivier “a full-time or a part-time job at a constituency office or appointments to boards or commissions.” If the Premier thinks there's nothing wrong, will she tell Ontarians who made the decision to dangle these jobs in front of Andrew Olivier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, the member opposite knows that I have talked about this in the House

and outside of the House. I have talked about the fact that I made a decision that Glenn Thibeault was going to be our candidate in Sudbury. We're very happy to have him. It was a tough decision for Glenn, to run for us and leave the NDP, but he made that decision, and we're very pleased to have him with us. He will be a strong, strong voice for Sudbury.

There is an investigation going on. That investigation is happening outside of this House. We'll work with the authorities, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last year, the Premier said, "Here was what was top of mind ... when I came into this office: How are we going to ... make sure ... questions that are being asked are going to be answered?" Good question.

My question isn't complicated, but it's very serious, and the Premier has refused to answer it 31 times. The Premier insists there was no wrongdoing in Sudbury, so I'm not sure why she's refusing to answer a basic question: Who gave Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed those noble instructions to offer Andrew Olivier a job?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I have said, and I will read again what the Chief Electoral Officer stated—I remind the member opposite that Elections Ontario determined that the allegations against me and the member for Sudbury were baseless. He went on to say, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

The leader of the third party has decided that she understands everything about what happened. She has got her own narrative and her own reasons for raising it in the way that she does. I understand those reasons. She's in a very tough spot. They didn't win the by-election in Sudbury, and I know that's a real problem for them.

The fact is, there is an investigation going on. It's happening outside of this House. I will work with the authorities outside of this House.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. The Premier says that she made up her mind to appoint her candidate back in November, but as of December 12, her deputy chief of staff didn't know, her campaign director didn't know, the local Liberal king-maker didn't know, Andrew Olivier didn't know, the local riding association didn't know. In fact, nobody seemed to know. Does the Premier have any evidence to back up her story?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, once again, I've made repeated statements on this matter. I made a statement on Friday that is in the public realm, and the leader of the third party can read it. Again, I'll repeat what I said there. I said that there's an investigation under way. That process is entirely independent of gov-

ernment and of this House. We respect the process, and I hope that the opposition parties do the same. We will work with the authorities outside of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier says that she decided to appoint her candidate back in November. She can't seem to find any evidence for her story.

On Tuesday, the Deputy Premier said, "The Premier listens to advice and then she has a conversation with her soul...."

Did the Premier have a conversation with anyone, other than her soul, about this decision, and can she back that up with evidence?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows full well that I have been very clear about what I decided in Sudbury. I decided that Glenn Thibeault was going to be our candidate.

There is an investigation going on. That investigation is happening outside of this Legislature.

I am very proud of our new MPP for Sudbury. I am very proud of Glenn Thibeault. Glenn has been a strong advocate for the people of Sudbury. He ran for us because he knows how important it is to invest in people, in their talent and their skills; how important it is to invest in infrastructure. He knows that there's infrastructure that the people of Sudbury need in order for Sudbury to be able to thrive. He knows that it's important that people have some security in their retirement. That's why he ran for us, and that's why we're pleased to have him as our member, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Nearly two years ago, the Premier said this: "Throughout the run-up to the leadership, I said that it was absolutely imperative that we open up the process and that we provide information...." That's not a very lofty goal; it's just the basics of good government. This is the 13th time the Premier has been asked for evidence, and Ontarians have still not got an answer.

1100

Now, I think it's absolutely imperative that the Premier opens up and provides information. Can the Premier provide any evidence at all that supports her version of the Sudbury bribery scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just speak to the first part of the question that the member opposite has raised, that is, the issues that I raised when I was running in leadership and my intention and then my commitment and my follow-through to open up the process that was ongoing at that point. I did that.

The scope of the justice committee was expanded. There were hundreds of thousands of documents that were brought before that committee. Dozens of witnesses came and talked about the situation of the cancellation of the gas plants. That process was opened up, and we changed the rules in terms of retention of documents and in terms of the siting of large energy infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I did exactly what I said I was going to do. I said we were going to change the process. We were going to open it up. That's what I did.

In this particular investigation, as I've said, it's happening outside of this House, and we'll co-operate with the authorities.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. As one of your chief advisers, Ms. Patricia Sorbara must listen to a lot of your phone calls. On tape, she told Mr. Olivier that the Premier knew "how massive" of an ask this is. Sorbara told Mr. Olivier, "You're ... the third person I've ever heard ... ask this of." There was a lot of asking from your office, but not a lot of telling.

Premier, who are the other two people you asked to step aside? And did Ms. Sorbara offer them any appointments?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the investigation is happening outside of this House, and I will fully, fully co-operate and work with the authorities, as we all will. But the fact is that that investigation is not happening inside this House. It's a completely independent process. It's independent of government, and it's independent of this Legislature. We'll work with the authorities outside this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: My supplementary is back to the Premier. It's well known that Andrew Olivier wasn't the only person seeking the Liberal Sudbury nomination. The recorded call said that Gerry Lougheed and Patricia Sorbara talked to Marianne Matichuk about the nomination. Mr. Lougheed said, "Now Marianne ... has to just... get lost."

Premier, did your operatives tell Ms. Matichuk to just get lost? Or did they also offer her jobs, appointments or whatever?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Good morning, Speaker. I really do want to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ontario PC Party on being the cover story of the current issue of National Geographic magazine.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will remind us all that my job is to try to reach some decorum in this place. I'd like all members to be helpful with that. Having done so, we would be able to finish our question-and-answer period in a way in which I know that everyone would want us to.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, it's a sincere congratulations. "The War on Science" article—this issue is on newsstands now. I would be happy to pass my copy off to you, maybe for your signature, Speaker.

I do think that the notion that—"Evolution Never Happened" is a cover story here; "Climate Change Does Not Exist." This is a wonderful synopsis of the PC Party of Ontario, and I want to say congratulations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I remind everyone what I said about props.

Carry on, please.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. On December 12, Pat Sorbara said to Andrew Olivier, "You've been directly asked by the leader and the Premier to make a decision to step aside to allow Glenn to have the ... opportunity uncontested."

Is that what the Premier, in her soul, had discussed before giving Pat Sorbara her instructions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Once again, Mr. Speaker, as I have said a number of times this morning, the investigation is taking place outside of this House. I take this matter very, very seriously, and I've spoken to it repeatedly. Elections Ontario has made a decision. They determined that the allegations against me and the member for Sudbury were baseless. The Chief Electoral Officer said this: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

So the fact is, that process has gone into the next phase, and that is the investigation that is taking place now. But it's taking place outside of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Let's do some more soul-searching. On December 11, Gerry Lougheed said to Andrew Olivier, "So I come to you on behalf of the Premier and on behalf of"—yes—"Thibeault more indirectly, to ask you if you would consider stepping down—even more than that, Andrew, nominating him." Is that what the Premier and her soul had discussed before giving Gerry Lougheed his instructions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite is asking me whether I wanted Andrew Olivier to be involved in the party, I've said that many times. I wanted to keep him involved, as I hope the party opposite is working to keep their past candidate involved. I think it's important for leaders and members to reach out to people who have either lost an election or who have not been involved, to bring them back into the fold. I have said repeatedly that I think that that is a responsibility of leaders of a party.

But in terms of this particular situation, the investigation is happening outside of this House, and we'll continue to work with the authorities.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is to the Premier as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Mr. Speaker, human rights are an essential staple in any democracy, and all Ontarians have a right to live free from discrimination, inequality and intolerance. The protection of human rights is a fundamental principle in this province.

This government has taken the most significant steps to strengthen our human rights in some 40 years to better ensure dignity and justice for all Ontarians. Our strengthened human rights system supports these rights by better enforcing the Ontario Human Rights Code and ensuring dignity by providing timely and efficient access to justice

for those who face discrimination. Unfortunately, I don't feel that this excellent leadership gets the appropriate notice. Mr. Speaker, through you, can the Premier as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, enlighten this House on how this government has ensured human rights are ensured for every Ontarian?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member for the question, and I also agree that the defence of human rights is an essential part of our community and our role. I want to take this opportunity to thank Barbara Hall for her work as chief commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Thank you, Barbara.

Mr. Speaker, over the past decade, Barbara oversaw the work of the OHRC during the transition of Ontario's human rights system. The OHRC's mandate changed to focus on the big issues, looking for the roots of discrimination. Under the leadership of Ms. Hall, the commission tackled many challenges, some that were new and some that had been around for some time.

There are three particular areas that stand out to me: housing; mental disabilities, including addictions; and gender identity and gender expression. People didn't necessarily see the human rights value in these areas right away, but thanks to the hard work of Barbara and the Ontario Human Rights Commission, we've made great improvements for some of Ontario's most vulnerable citizens.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Premier for her answer. The work that has been accomplished in this area is truly honourable, and it's a model for all other jurisdictions to follow.

I still feel as though this progress in an essential area of our province needs to be brought to the attention of not only the residents of Etobicoke-Lakeshore, but of all the residents of Ontario. I understand that, in 2008, the Ontario government commissioned a report in order to maximize the potential of the human rights system throughout this province.

Will the Premier in her capacity as Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs elaborate on the expanded mandate of the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal and what areas have been changed during the wonderful tenure of Ms. Hall? I'm sure this House would be very appreciative to know what progress has been made.

1110

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to thank the member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore for his work at the municipal level. I know that he will carry that work on provincially.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission addresses the underlying causes of discrimination—that's what they exist to do. Through education, policy development and research, the commission works to preserve the spirit of tolerance that has long characterized Ontario.

Homeless people, people with mental health disabilities or transgendered people often didn't even know that they had human rights and didn't know what their rights were; and employers, service providers and educators

didn't know that they had responsibilities. The OHRC was part of a process to address these issues and to help break down barriers.

Mr. Speaker, I want to extend my appreciation for the hard work and dedication of Chief Commissioner Barbara Hall. After more than 30 years as a community worker, lawyer, municipal politician and public servant, Barbara Hall will now be entering the next phase of her life.

Barbara, on behalf of all Ontarians, I want to thank you for your devotion to public service. Thank you very much.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, on Tuesday, in your absence, the Attorney General stated that under section 25 of the Police Services Act, you as Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services are unable to ask a member of the police services board to resign. That may be true, but that's not the question that was asked.

Minister, will you ask the Ontario Civilian Police Commission, the independent oversight body of Ontario police services boards, to investigate the inappropriate actions of Mr. Gerry Lougheed as laid out in the Chief Electoral Officer's report?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I would have hoped that the member would have used his valuable time to talk about his private member's bill, Ryan's Law, but he chooses to talk about issues that are not relevant to the lives and the well-being of Ontarians—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. Stop the clock. While I'm at it, I'll remind all members that we don't make reference to someone's attendance here.

Interjection.

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

Continue.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As I have stated on numerous occasions before and a couple of times today, we know, in the case of the Sudbury police board, that they've looked at the matter, and they've decided to keep Mr. Lougheed as the chair of the board. We need to respect the jurisdiction of the local police service while an investigation is ongoing. If anyone feels that there has been a breach of the code of conduct of the Ontario Civilian Police Commission, they have the authority to initiate an investigation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the minister: Minister, it's inappropriate and very insulting to the people of Ontario to say that the decision to keep Mr. Lougheed as chair was made by the Greater Sudbury Police Services Board. That wasn't their call to make. Only the Ontario Civilian Police Commission can decide whether Mr. Lougheed gets to keep his job or not.

Minister, you know that if the Ontario Civilian Police Commission starts an investigation, Mr. Lougheed must step aside until the investigation is done and any subsequent hearings are heard. Why won't you ask for this investigation? What are you afraid Mr. Lougheed would say if you did?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, on this side of the chamber, we respect the process. We respect the independence of our investigative bodies. There's a reason that bodies like the Ontario Civilian Police Commission are created: so that there is a separation from decisions that are made by the government, the political arm of the government, and that of other independent agencies. Under section 25 of the Police Services Act, the Ontario Civilian Police Commission has the authority to initiate investigations and to look at the code of conduct. We should leave those matters to those independent bodies because it is within their jurisdiction.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. I know that the season of House of Cards is coming out tomorrow, but I'm not sure the Liberals realize that it's not actually a documentary. As much as Frank Underwood intrigues us, behaving like him is beneath the office of the Premier of Ontario.

When will the Premier start showing a little bit of respect for Ontarians and tell the people of our province who gave Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed their instructions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The reason I made the statement that I did on Friday and was very clear about the situation, and made that publicly outside of this House, was out of respect for the people of Ontario. Out of respect—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sergeant-at-Arms, confiscate the property.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order. Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I said in that statement is that I take this very seriously. I said Pat Sorbara will continue to fully co-operate with the authorities as the investigation unfolds. I said that clearly. I said that if charges were laid, then Pat Sorbara would of course step aside. On our review, we don't think that's going to happen, but that will be up to others to decide, which is exactly what the Chief Electoral Officer has said.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Deputy Premier this week said that she was bored of question period. I'm so sorry that the Liberal government believes that democracy is boring. It's clear that the Liberals believe that they're above the law, and apparently they're above answering our questions.

The Premier has a choice. She can continue to avoid answering our questions or she can treat Ontarians with the respect that they deserve. The question is this: Who gave Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed their instructions to offer Andrew Olivier a job?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I have a deep respect for question period. I have a deep respect for the democratic process. That's why I'm here. That's why I'm here answering the questions over and over again.

As I said in my statement on Friday, Pat Sorbara will continue to fully co-operate with the authorities as the investigation unfolds.

Interjection.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member for Nipissing is heckling about the retention of information. I think the member for Nipissing knows perfectly well that we have changed the rules here. We have trained our staff. Everyone knows that we've changed those rules on the advice of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. I just don't think he should get away with that, Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll just conclude by saying that in the meantime, I'm not going to force someone to resign in the face of allegations that I do not believe to be true, but we will continue to work with the authorities.

CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: This question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Minister, last month you announced a significant change to corrections policy that relates to transgendered inmates. Previously, inmates in Ontario were housed based on their primary sexual characteristics. They were unable to express their gender identity by selecting their own clothing and personal pronouns.

The people of Ontario understood that it was time to change this outdated policy. In our province, everyone should be free from discrimination and harassment. In our province, we want to make sure that—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: —everyone has rights. This means that the transgendered inmates housed in our—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If you have it a second time, it will cost you.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: —must be given dignity and respect.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can the minister explain the change in Ontario's policy towards transgendered inmates?

1120

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the member from Sudbury for the opportunity for me to share this very important milestone.

Last month, I was proud to announce a new policy for transgendered inmates in our correctional facilities. This policy builds on Toby's Act and aligns practices with the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Ontario Human Rights Commission guidelines. I want to take this opportunity to thank the commissioner, Barbara Hall, and the commission for their ongoing guidance on this very important issue.

Speaker, this policy will ensure that transgendered inmates are placed in an institution appropriate to their gender identity. They will be called by their preferred name and gender pronoun, and they will be provided the opportunity to choose the gender of staff performing searches. During these searches, they will be given privacy.

This policy was developed through extensive consultations across the province with civil rights groups and correctional working groups.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Minister, for your work in bringing the north to the table to consult on this important subject. I know many people and organizations, including the police service in my great riding of Sudbury, have put a lot of time into this issue.

This policy supports the government's obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code by helping to protect the rights of transgendered inmates. However, there are still some who may be concerned for the safety of transgendered inmates in our institutions.

Minister, you have stated that the safety and security of all inmates and staff is one of your top priorities, so it is vital that the rights of transgendered inmates are protected and their security safeguarded as well.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can the minister explain what measures will be taken to ensure the safety of transgendered inmates while they are in our correctional facilities?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Indeed, the safety and security of all our inmates and staff is a top priority of mine and the government.

Speaker, in order to ensure their proper care, placement and safety, transgendered inmates will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Inmates will be consulted during the accommodation process. This will help determine the best housing option for the inmate. Instead of being isolated, transgendered inmates will be integrated into the general population, when possible, if that is their preference.

We had extensive consultations on this issue, including with trans activists from Sudbury and the Sudbury police service. One trans advocate from Sudbury recently called these rights the most progressive anywhere in North America.

Speaker, protecting the rights of transgendered inmates is an important step as we transform corrections in Ontario and build even safer communities.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Last year's throne speech contained at least one accurate statement: that in government "trust is hard-earned, but easily lost." How does the Premier expect the people of Ontario to trust her when she refuses to dismiss a top aide who appears to have broken Ontario's election law in the Sudbury by-election?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, that is up to the people of Ontario, and it is up to the people of every riding in the province. It's up to the people of Sudbury, for example, to make their decisions.

What I have to do is I have to tell the people of Ontario what I'm doing and when I'm doing it.

On the issue that the member opposite has raised, I've been very clear: Pat Sorbara will continue to fully cooperate with the authorities as the investigation unfolds. If charges are laid, then Pat Sorbara, of course, would step aside. I have said that publicly, Mr. Speaker, and I repeat that, and I reinforce that we will work with the authorities. But that investigation is taking place outside of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: Police services boards are responsible for governing and overseeing the delivery of police services. As such, their members should be held to the highest standards of integrity. When Elections Ontario concludes that a provincial appointee to a police services board appears to have broken the law, which is exactly what they wrote in their report, the Premier cannot pretend that this is just another day at the office.

Again, to quote the throne speech, "Trust is hard-earned, but easily lost." Mr. Speaker, how on earth does the Premier of Ontario expect the people of Ontario to trust her when she continues to express confidence in the police services board chair, who appears to have broken Ontario's election law in the Sudbury by-election?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, it's obvious by the number of questions on this issue that members opposite are very concerned and very passionate about integrity in government. What I would like to ask them is, where were they in 2011 when four Harper Conservatives were investigated, charged, pled guilty and were fined for violations of the elections act? None of them—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The member from Leeds–Grenville will desist, the member from Dufferin–Caledon will desist, and the member from Nepean–Carleton will desist.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: So my question is, if they are so concerned and so passionate, where were they in 2011?

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier, of course. It's not just the opposition party that's saying the government's behaviour is wrong, Premier; it's also the Toronto Star, the Toronto Sun, the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Waterloo Record and the Hamilton Spectator.

Earlier this week, the Sudbury Star published an editorial which ran under the headline "Wynne's Actions Shameful During Sudbury Debacle." The Premier seems to think she can ignore the scandal—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Eglinton–Lawrence, come to order.

Mr. Paul Miller: —but she's being called out by voices all over this province. Will she come clean and will she start telling the true story?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been taking this seriously from the beginning. I absolutely understand that it is extremely important for me to be very clear in this House and outside of this House with the public. I think to suggest that I'm not taking this seriously is just not accurate. I am absolutely taking it seriously. I've been clear that unlike—the Deputy Premier just went through an example where quite the opposite of what we're doing was taking place under the Harper Conservatives.

I've said that Pat Sorbara will continue to work with the authorities, but if there's a charge laid, then of course she would step aside. That's not what happened in Ottawa, and I've been very clear that that is the action that we're taking. In the meantime, we will work with the authorities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Paul Miller: The Sudbury Star goes on to say, "One would have expected Wynne to be more contrite, given the bombshell. She should have had the grace to look at least a little penitent.

"Instead, Wynne lashed out...."

The Liberals are on the wrong side of the scandal, and everyone knows it but the Premier. Will the Premier show some contrition and start telling Ontarians the truth?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been speaking about this repeatedly. I take this matter very seriously. Let's just be clear: There have been a couple of processes under way. Elections Ontario determined that the allegations against me and the member for Sudbury were baseless. We'll continue to fully co-operate as the Elections Ontario examination moves to the next phase. But the Chief Electoral Officer 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 process has moved to the next stage. We will work with the authorities in that phase of the investigation, but that investigation is happening outside of this Legislature.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question today is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. I know that Ontario is the top jurisdiction in Canada for mineral exploration and I'm very proud to be part of a government that understands the importance of the north and the importance of the mining sector for our province.

As some of us may know, the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada will be holding its highly anticipated 2015 annual convention here in Toronto next week. Can the Minister of Northern Development and Mines please update this House with respect to this annual convention and explain how it is showcasing Ontario's mining sector?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I thank the member for Davenport for giving me an opportunity to speak about the Prospectors and Developers Association conference, PDAC, which starts this coming Sunday. It's a remarkable convention. There are over 25,000 attendees from over 100 countries, and it's a tremendous opportunity for us, the province of Ontario, to showcase the many successes of the province's mining sector.

1130

We will be kicking off PDAC this coming Sunday evening with our annual Ontario reception. There will be municipal, industry, First Nation and Métis Nation guests coming to that reception. We invite everyone from the Legislature. I'm sure my critics will be there, but we hope all of you attend that event.

What we really want to be able to make clear and encourage as much as possible is to tell the story of Ontario. The province does remain one of the most attractive destinations for mineral exploration investment in Canada and around the world, and we're going to tell our story.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I want to thank the minister for his update.

Mr. Speaker, our province's mining sector is impressive. I'm certainly pleased that Ontario is hosting this important international conference, actually the largest conference of its kind in the world. I know that the international delegates who are here will enjoy all that the city of Toronto has to offer.

As we all know, the mining industry is very important not only to northern Ontario but to the entire province. I know that our government continues to engage both corporate and First Nation partners to make sure we are creating the dynamic and innovative business climate that we need for the sector.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: How is our government showcasing our support for such an important industry at this convention?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you once again for the question. The fact is that our government is absolutely committed to maintaining a very positive investment climate for mining. I think one of the most clear indicators of investment attractiveness is unquestionably exploration spending. The fact that Ontario remains the Canadian leader and one of the top jurisdictions for mineral exploration expenditures in the world is incredibly important—let alone mineral production topping over \$11 billion last year, let alone the fact that we've got new mines opening up coming up this year and others.

There's lots of work to do, Mr. Speaker, but we have a great and attractive investment climate here in the province of Ontario, and we hope that everybody will be there at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada to help us sell this to investors from all around the world.

ÉLECTION PARTIELLE À SUDBURY

M^{me} Gila Martow: Ma question est adressée à la première ministre. Madame la Première Ministre, comment est-ce possible que quelqu'un qui est le sujet d'une enquête pour des irrégularités peut maintenir l'accès aux données gouvernementales qui se font investiguer?

Pensez-vous vraiment que ceci reflète la qualité de gouvernement que les résidents de l'Ontario méritent?

L'hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Je crois que les résidents, les gens, de l'Ontario méritent la vérité, un gouvernement honnête et un gouvernement qui travaille très, très fort pour adresser les «concernes» de l'infrastructure, de l'éducation et de la santé.

Cette investigation ne se passe pas ici—

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Ne se passe pas sur le plancher de l'Assemblée législative.

L'hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —sur le plancher de l'Assemblée législative. L'investigation, c'est une investigation—

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Par les autorités.

L'hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —par les autorités. Je veux et je dois travailler avec les autorités, et je fais ça.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} Gila Martow: Encore à la première ministre : madame la Première Ministre, vous savez très bien que Sorbara peut accéder aux données gouvernementales et qu'elle pourrait être en train de les supprimer en ce moment. Quand allez-vous lui montrer la sortie?

L'hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: L'investigation ne se passe pas ici dans l'Assemblée législative. L'investigation se passe avec les autorités et je dois travailler avec les autorités.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is for the Premier. The Liberals and the Premier are facing criminal investigation. This is serious, and the response from the Liberals is to talk about the 407, the PanAm Games and GO Transit. Instead of showing leadership, the Premier

has instead reverted to some of the most shameful diversion tactics this Legislature has ever seen. We all thought the performance last Friday was the low point, but yesterday, this self-proclaimed progressive Premier stooped to using missing and murdered aboriginal women as part of a deflection strategy. This is not how a Premier behaves—

Interjections.

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

Please.

Miss Monique Taylor: This is now how a Premier behaves, and this is not how a government that claims to be progressive behaves.

Will the Premier take the high road, show some leadership and answer the question? Who told Gerry Lougheed—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I want to remind the member from Hamilton Mountain that when I stand, you sit. I think I'll say it again so that she sees that I'm talking to her: When I stand, you sit.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will just say a couple of things. First of all, on Friday, I made a statement that was very heartfelt. I made that statement because I believed it was important for the people of Ontario—not just the people in the House, but the people of Ontario—to know exactly where I stood. What I said in that statement is that Pat Sorbara and I will continue to co-operate with the authorities as the investigation unfolds. I said that if charges are laid, then of course Pat Sorbara will step aside, but in the meantime we will continue to work with the authorities.

The member opposite is right: I have said in this House, and I said it as recently as yesterday, that I think there are many, many other important things we need to be talking about—not that this isn't important; it is, and I take it seriously. But issues like the missing and murdered aboriginal women—it's a very important issue. I'm travelling today to Ottawa to take part in a round table tomorrow. It's a very, very serious issue.

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

New question. The member from Kitchener Centre—

Interjection.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker.

Yesterday, Speaker, the Liberals' non-answer got so over the top that you yourself had to interject. You said, "The tradition of this place is that the question put deserves attention by the answer." These are serious questions that deserve answers, and every time Ontarians get another ridiculous non-answer, the Liberals just show how arrogant they really are.

The Premier has been asked this question 35 times, and she still refuses to answer. Who gave Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed their instructions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the direct answer to that question is that there is an investigation taking place. That investigation is not happening in this House. That investigation is happening outside this House.

The member opposite is right. I know she hasn't been here very long, but I will acknowledge that she's right. Yesterday, there were other issues that we wanted to talk about. There are many other issues that are very, very important for a progressive government like ours that is actively working on issues like health care, like education, like the issues facing our aboriginal communities. Those are the reasons I got into government. Those are the issues we are working on to make sure that we continue to support the people of Ontario and their communities and help them to thrive.

Interjections.

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

Start the clock. Now it's a new question.

NURSES

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. We have so many people visiting us today at the Legislature who are in the nursing profession, and it's unfortunate that so far today they have not been mentioned. The opposition has had a chance to do that and, sadly, they have not.

Let me ask a question about the people who work in this very important profession. In my riding of Kitchener Centre, we value nurses in hospitals, in clinics and in long-term-care facilities. I would like to ask the minister to please speak to this. Tell us how important our nurses are in our province.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I say this with the greatest respect, but utter astonishment: Neither of the opposition parties asked a single question about our nursing profession. I'm actually going to encourage us all to stand up, recognize and appreciate, acknowledge and celebrate the more than 135,000 nurses who are working hard every single day across this great province.

Applause.

1140

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We'd like to move on, but we can't get answers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Nipissing, come to order.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, while I'm being heckled on this important issue, I have to say that the people across this province like their doctors—well, perhaps present company excepted right now.

But Ontarians love their nurses. They love their nurses, Mr. Speaker. My own sister, for nearly 40 years, has been a practising RN, proudly serving the people of Haldimand-Norfolk. It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity, with the Premier, in just a few minutes

to spend time with RNAO and their representatives to speak with them in detail.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister for his very eloquent answer and for the standing ovation we have given nurses in our province.

If you have had the opportunity, Minister, to speak with nurses today, could you please share with us your conversations with them?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to say as well that over the past seven or eight months, eight months that I've been Minister of Health, I've had the pleasure of working responsibly and closely with our nurses, whether they are our RNs, our nurse practitioners or RPNs.

I want to give them credit as well when we were working on the Ebola crisis. Quite frankly, it was the nurses from across this province and across this country, those front-line health workers, who alerted us that more needed to be done, that we needed to do a better job at preparing for the potential of an Ebola case coming to this province. I want to thank them for their advocacy and their hard work to make sure that we provided the best possible care and preparedness that we could.

And it doesn't stop there, with international patients, with refugee health care, social determinants of health—enhancing community care, their report that they issued recently that helps to direct and guide us on important improvements and changes that we need to make in this province.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank them for being here, and I look forward to seeing them promptly.

Interjections.

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: The question is back to the Premier. Premier, I've just received a public statement, as of 11 a.m., from the Greater Sudbury Police Services Board's vice-chair of the board.

This week, the police services board held an in-camera meeting. They've retained legal counsel to discuss the findings of the Chief Electoral Officer's report. They resolve to correspond with the Ontario Civilian Police Commission because they're concerned about the situation.

Premier, the people of Sudbury, the men and women of the Sudbury police force and the members of the police services board need your leadership. They need you to have Gerry Loughheed and Pat Sorbara step aside while this investigation is going on.

Please, heed what the police services board is expressing in their concern. Do the right thing. Ask them to step aside.

Interjections.

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

Premier?

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I have now offered a response to this question God knows how many times. We know that police services boards exist to provide adequate and effective policing within their jurisdictions. Police services boards are composed of both municipal appointments and provincial appointments. They are subject to a code of conduct that is enacted through regulation. If there is a breach, if there is suspicion of a breach around that code of conduct, the responsibility to make a determination rests with the Ontario Civilian Police Commission.

Speaker, you may ask why with the Ontario Civilian Police Commission? Because that's an arm's-length agency that has no engagement with the government. That's why we should let the OCPC do their job and be able to see if they feel they need to review—

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the minister: Minister, you know what this board does. You know why the police services board retained legal counsel and made this decision. They are obviously as concerned as we are with this issue. They made the decision without the chair involved in their decision. It's right here in black and white. You're the minister; you've got the authority under the act to also ask the civilian commission to look into this. Do your job.

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As I mentioned earlier, I think we should let the independent agencies do their work as stipulated within the legislation. Under section 25 of the Police Services Act, the OCPC has the authority to look into the matter, and I will leave it up to them.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order, the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, if I may, I would like to introduce Claudia Mariano and all the nurses from the West Durham Family Health Team in my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East. They do a fantastic job each and every day, and I thank them.

CLOSED CAPTIONING

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: On a point of order: It's come to my attention on behalf of one of my constituents that we no longer offer closed captioning for our proceedings in the assembly, particularly during question period. I'd like to raise that as a point to yourself, as well as to the members of the Board of Internal Economy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I'll take that under advisement and return to the member.

VISITEURS

VISITORS

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Monsieur le Président, it's a point of order.

Il me fait grand plaisir de présenter à la Chambre M. Denis Vaillancourt, qui est ici aujourd'hui pour venir nous parler au caucus de la francophonie. Donc, un grand merci à M. Vaillancourt pour tout son travail à l'association francophone de l'Ontario.

Mr. Mike Colle: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to introduce one of the giants of the Canadian mining industry, a member of the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame, a true legend in mining in Canada. Mr. Bill James is here with us today.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: A very quick point of order: I want to introduce my very dear, sweet, supportive sister, Susan Houghton, who arrived late for question period, but there she is.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Point of order: I would like to introduce Hugh Moran from the Ontario Petroleum Institute and a London West constituent.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do want to remind all the members in the House that, knowing that all three House leaders know that we have a deferred vote, I'm going to ask that we cut back on these points of order because even moving into the next phase is actually part of the vote. So it would be very helpful if we held off on any of these, except if they are points of order that deserve attention immediately; I would ask that.

CLOSED CAPTIONING

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Saying such, I looked into it and we do continue to provide the service.

DEFERRED VOTES

ONTARIO RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN ACT, 2015

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

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put 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.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister, I'd like to get through this.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1149 to 1154.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would all members please take their seats?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I had one that used to say, "What do I do with it?"

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Don't tempt me.

On February 17, Ms. Hunter moved second reading of Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Mr. Naqvi has moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Naqvi's motion will rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul
Anderson, Granville	Gélinas, France	Murray, Glen R.
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gravelle, Michael	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Baker, Yvan	Gretzky, Lisa	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Hatfield, Percy	Natyshak, Taras
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Oraziotti, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Horwath, Andrea	Potts, Arthur
Bisson, Gilles	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Rinaldi, Lou
Chiarelli, Bob	Jaczek, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Coteau, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Crack, Grant	Lalonde, Marie-France	Singh, Jagmeet
Damerla, Dipika	Leal, Jeff	Sousa, Charles
Del Duca, Steven	MacCharles, Tracy	Tabuns, Peter
Delaney, Bob	Malhi, Harinder	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Mangat, Amrit	Taylor, Monique
Dickson, Joe	Mantha, Michael	Thibeault, Glenn
DiNovo, Cheri	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Dong, Han	Matthews, Deborah	Vernile, Daiene
Fife, Catherine	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Forster, Cindy	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
French, Jennifer K.	Milczyn, Peter Z.	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Pettapiece, Randy
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Dunlop, Garfield	Martow, Gila	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McDonell, Jim	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 71; the nays are 21.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Ms. Hunter has moved second reading of Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

Interjection: Same vote?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just before we do that, I was asked if we have the same vote. Same vote? I heard noes.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bell rang from 1158 to 1159.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ms. Hunter has moved second reading of Bill 56. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul
Anderson, Granville	Gélinas, France	Murray, Glen R.
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gravelle, Michael	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Baker, Yvan	Gretzky, Lisa	Naqvi, Yasir
Balkissoon, Bas	Hatfield, Percy	Natyshak, Taras
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Oraziotti, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Horwath, Andrea	Potts, Arthur
Bisson, Gilles	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Rinaldi, Lou
Chiarelli, Bob	Jaczek, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Colle, Mike	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Coteau, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Sergio, Mario
Crack, Grant	Lalonde, Marie-France	Singh, Jagmeet
Damerla, Dipika	Leal, Jeff	Sousa, Charles
Del Duca, Steven	MacCharles, Tracy	Tabuns, Peter
Delaney, Bob	Malhi, Harinder	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Mangat, Amrit	Taylor, Monique
Dickson, Joe	Mantha, Michael	Thibeault, Glenn
DiNovo, Cheri	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Dong, Han	Matthews, Deborah	Vernile, Daiene
Fife, Catherine	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Forster, Cindy	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine	Zimmer, David
French, Jennifer K.	Milczyn, Peter Z.	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted	Jones, Sylvia	Pettapiece, Randy
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Dunlop, Garfield	Martow, Gila	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McDonell, Jim	Thompson, Lisa M.
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Miller, Norm	Wilson, Jim
Hillier, Randy	Munro, Julia	Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 71; the nays are 21.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

The Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So ordered.

CLOSED CAPTIONING

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order, Speaker.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Earlier, I had mentioned that we didn't have closed captioning. Apparently, it is on the

television. That said, it is not in the live House webcast online. My constituent has just contacted me again to ensure that we do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That is not a point of order. It's not in the House business, so I'll get back to the member.

There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1203 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Todd Smith: I have a number of names to read off, all members of the Ontario Real Estate Association here in support of a bill that I'll be introducing a little bit later on in the proceedings. So please bear with me and I beg your indulgence: Costa Pouloupoulos, Tom Lebour, Karen Cox, Brian Graham, Sean Morrison, Johnmark Roberts, Lisa Wale, Ettore Cardarelli, Tim Barber and Ray Ferris.

OREA staff members: Matthew Thornton, Sylvia Pena and Adam Yahn.

From Durham region: Roger Bouma, Nancy Shaw, Cathie Ketcheson and Sandra O'Donohue.

From Oakville: Von Jeppesen and Jack McCrudden.

From the Toronto Real Estate Board: Filippo Sbrocchi, Andrew Wells, Chris Allen, Tina Sibbald, Kevin Crigger, Cynthia Lee and Katie Young.

From the Mississauga Real Estate Board: Allan Todd, Nigel Purai and Donna Metcalfe.

From the Brampton Real Estate Board: Denise Dilbey, Bernadine Bowen, Joselle and Rui Alves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We welcome all our guests who are in the east members' gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): They're watching you.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I would like to introduce Kristy May. She's a wonderful intern with the Ontario Legislative Internship Program, and today is her last day. We're going to miss her greatly.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'd like to welcome to the gallery Catherine Bell-Sood of Kingston and the Islands; Raman Sood, Kingston and the Islands; Dev Sood, president of the South Asian seniors association in Etobicoke; Manohar Lal Verma, Etobicoke; Balbir Singh Bedi, Brampton; Madan Lal Mahey, Brampton—excuse my pronunciation—Ranjit Mohindra, Whitby; Clary Klieb, Toronto; and Jack Klieb, Toronto. Welcome.

They're here to hear a petition on pharmacare.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PETER REMILLARD

Mr. Jim McDonell: This past Tuesday morning, my riding of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry tragically lost an outstanding citizen. Peter Remillard was a very respected lawyer in Morrisburg and Chesterville, known throughout the business and farming community. He was

called to the Ontario bar in 1979 and to the Quebec bar in 1981. He joined the local Gorrell and Grenkie law firm in 1983.

Peter left his mark on this community for his years of service. He presided over the Morrisburg and District Chamber of Commerce, the Dundas district cancer society, the Morrisburg Business Improvement Area, and was a director of the Winchester and District Hospital Foundation and the Upper Canada Playhouse. He was also active in martial arts, on the parent council for schools and recreation, and on local law associations. Peter also gave law lectures for farmers at conferences for the Ministry of Agriculture.

His friend and legal partner Doug Grenkie said of him, "Peter was a brilliant lawyer, [who] worked hard for the people and gave wise advice to all. He never said no to anyone. Peter was a strong worker in the community and he enjoyed family."

Peter's love of life, family, people, law and hard work is an inspiration, and he will be missed by all. On behalf of the residents of Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, I wish to offer our heartfelt condolences to his wife Patricia, son Liam, brother Richard, sister Kathleen and parents Romeo and Margaret.

VYRN PETERSON

Mr. Michael Mantha: With municipal leaders returning home and OGRA/ROMA coming to an end this week, it was obvious someone was missing. Vyrn Peterson dedicated many years of his life to serving the community of Blind River. Vyrn entered into politics in 1978 and kept his seat until his recent passing, serving as mayor and councillor.

Vyrn worked on every single committee and probably created a few. Vyrn did politics differently. Don't get me wrong, he always brought his A game, but when the election was done, it was done, and up went his sleeves, and he immediately went to work for his constituents, always keeping in mind and at heart his love for the community of Blind River.

Vyrn lived life to the fullest. His final request was that he wanted a celebration of life with laughter and music. Yes, Mr. Speaker, Johnny Cash and Elvis Presley were blasting at his celebration of life at the Blind River Legion yesterday.

Even during the hectic days on the campaign trails, he found time to have coffee with his competition, Mayor Sue Jensen.

Many community leaders across Algoma–Manitoulin, the province, even internationally, came to pay their respects to Vyrn. Organizations, such as his love for the Lions Club—where just two weeks ago he held court, sharing ideas and views on their projects.

The legionnaires were also there, saying their farewells to their comrade, stating, "We will remember him."

The Mason Men all came out to bid Vyrn adieu and safe journey to the higher kingdom. Many, many friends; so much respect shown for Vyrn.

Vyrn left many gifts; some of them were obvious in the strength and courage his granddaughter Tracey displayed when she shared a personal story on how her “Poppa” was her rock.

Vyrn was innovative, creative and had an amazing sense of humour, as his younger brother pointed out: how a simple can of pork and beans can be turned into a wonderful dish of fèves au lard.

The engine behind Vyrn was his love of his family. His loving wife, Betty, was always by his side in life as in family business. His love for his grandchildren was never in doubt; to the kids, he was known as “Poppa.”

In closing, Mr. Speaker, Vyrn, the ever so community minded person, was hoping to attend FONOM to accept his 35-year service pin. However, the powers that be needed him at His boardroom for community work.

To the Peterson family, I spoke to FONOM yesterday, and they would be honoured to present his 35-year pin to the family.

Congratulations, Vyrn. Rest in peace. Meeting adjourned.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: As we near the end of February, I’m pleased to rise today to share some of the great experiences I’ve had in celebrating Black History Month. There have been countless events and celebrations taking place throughout the province. I’ve been fortunate to attend a number of them in my Halton riding.

On February 5, I was invited by the Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton to attend a Black History Month kickoff celebration at Oakville town hall. In addition to the creative exhibits put on by the Oakville Museum, Sheridan College and the Association of African-Canadian Artists, attendees were treated to some incredible musical performances by Beyond Sound and the jazz duo Diana Braithwaite and Chris Whiteley.

Then on February 9 I visited a local school to watch an inspiring and thought-provoking documentary, *The Last White Knight*. Directed by Canadian Paul Saltzman, it was a remarkable tale of reconciliation and civil rights history, inspired by actual events during the early 1960s.

Just this past Tuesday, I joined the Premier, fellow caucus members and a number of special guests for a memorable reception right here at Queen’s Park.

Mr. Speaker, events like these are a valuable reminder of the vital role that diversity, acceptance and justice play in our province’s strength and prosperity. It’s important for us all to reflect on the history of Ontario’s black community; to acknowledge the struggles and hardships endured by so many. Holding month-long celebrations helps us to remain mindful of our difficult past and to appreciate past and present contributions.

LAKE HURON CENTRE FOR COASTAL CONSERVATION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Today it’s my pleasure to show support for the work that the Lake Huron Centre

for Coastal Conservation is doing in my riding of Huron–Bruce and neighbouring ridings as well.

The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation’s goal is to protect and restore Lake Huron’s coastal environment and to promote a healthy coastal ecosystem.

Interjection: Does that mean windmills?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It means no windmills.

I had the pleasure of meeting with Karen Alexander from the centre just last week, where she informed me of the excellent work their group is doing in regard to the invasive species phragmites.

Invasive phragmites is a serious threat to coastal systems because the dense monoculture stands severely disrupt natural coastal processes. The coastal centre has been working with municipalities to help control phragmites on the shoreline since the early 2000s. However, this year, more than ever, with water levels likely rising, they’ll also be lacking the proper tools to control this plant come the fall of 2015.

Invasive phragmites is an aggressive plant that spreads quickly and out-competes native species for water and nutrients. It releases toxins from its roots into the soil to hinder the growth of and kill surrounding plants.

I want to do everything I can to help support centres like this that are working hard to support our lakes and coastal systems. This centre, in particular, stands out to me because not only do they want what’s best for Lake Huron—in fact, all of the Great Lakes—but they also recognize the economic and social dimensions of sustainability.

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STEVE REVINGTON

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It’s my great honour to rise today to recognize Steve Revington, an extraordinary teacher from my riding of London West who was recently named among the top 50 finalists for the Global Teacher Prize. This is public education’s equivalent of the Nobel Prize, and Steve was one of only three Canadians selected from over 5,000 nominations from 137 countries.

The prize recognizes an exceptional teacher who has gone beyond the classroom to make an outstanding contribution to student learning and to the profession. This is exactly what Steve has done as a much-loved teacher at Emily Carr Public School and a respected mentor to his colleagues. Steve’s focus is on authentic learning, a style of learning that encourages students to create meaningful, useful products to be shared with the world. Authentic learning draws on brain research that says the closer learning is to real-life scenarios, the more motivated and engaged students become.

According to his students, authentic learning works. One student says, “Last year, my partner and I had to design a capsule that could protect an egg from a two-storey drop. I learned science, math, English etc. from the experience, and the way I learned these things is unforgettable. I can still envision my capsule dropping. I learned more in that unit than I did in all of grade 4.”

My heartfelt congratulations to Steve on his outstanding achievement and sincere thanks for the difference he is making for students.

YOUTH HAVEN BARRIE

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: On Saturday, February 21, Canadians from 65 communities across Canada participated in the Coldest Night of the Year, including the MPP from Newmarket–Aurora.

This walk provides participants with the opportunity to experience a hint of the challenges faced by those experiencing homelessness while raising revenue for important local charities. In Barrie, participants walked in support of the local shelter, Youth Haven.

And 2015 is a special year for Youth Haven, as they are celebrating their 25th year of incorporation and working to change the landscape of service provision for youth in need. Youth Haven has expanded its programming in this last year to include transitional housing in addition to the emergency services they have always provided.

Youth Haven also has 20 emergency beds available to any youth between the ages of 16 and 24 and now has five transitional beds where youth can stay for up to a year, have a lock on the door, develop deeper life skills and goals and experience semi-independent living in a supportive environment.

Youth Haven also offers case management, which helps participants expand their awareness of strengths, goals and barriers. The case manager works in tandem with a life skills coordinator, counsellors and community partners to provide wraparound care to the youth.

I thank this local organization for raising over \$25,000 for this great organization. Congratulations.

RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS DAY

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, 94.1 myFM's and Coad Plumbing, Heating and Air's Random Act of Kindness Day took place Wednesday, February 4, in St. Thomas and Elgin county. It was there to build on the vision that St. Thomas and Elgin county are building a better community but also to encourage the "pay it forward" philosophy.

Random Act of Kindness Day is an opportunity for individuals, schools, communities, service clubs, businesses, health care institutions and churches to perform small, simple, kind deeds; experience a unique grassroots initiative designed around doing nice things for nice people.

Last year, Random Act of Kindness Day caused a ripple effect across the county. We never imagined the tremendous response we would receive to this initiative in our community. The true impact of the Random Act of Kindness initiative may never fully be revealed. In St. Thomas and Elgin alone, myFM distributed over 5,000 cards, and if only a fraction of that was paid forward, Speaker, it was well worth it.

The real reason the concept has caught attention is that it reminds everyone of our greatest natural resource in St. Thomas and Elgin county, and that's the people.

On February 4, we met at Memorial Arena for a chili lunch. The chili lunch was provided by Kathy's Catering, and it was delicious. I want to thank Williams Funeral Home for also sponsoring the event. But we really want to be proud of Coad's heating and air conditioning, which gave out a free furnace for someone in need for the day, and also myFM for being such a strong promoter of our community.

EVENTS IN BEACHES—EAST YORK

Mr. Arthur Potts: While visitors regularly visit and flock to the Beach during the spring, summer and autumn seasons, it's not usually top of mind during the winter months, and especially not this year. But community builders are helping to make the Beach a year-round destination with events such as DeClute's Light up the Beach and now the Winter Stations project.

On Family Day of this year, five drab-looking life-guard stations between Kew Gardens and the Balmy Beach Club were transformed into vibrant pieces of art. Local resident Ted Merrick from Ferris and Associates had a vision to bring life to the Beach in winter. To make this happen, he reached out to his friend Roland Colthoff from RAW Design. He had input from art consultant Justin Ridgeway and sought the advice and assistance of local councillor Mary-Margaret McMahon.

Five submissions were picked out of more than 200 entries from around the world to dress up these five lifeguard stations on the beach. Sling Swing by Ed Butler, Dan Wiltshire and Frances McGeown evokes a canvas beach chair that you can sit in to give the feet a rest, and Driftwood Throne by Daniel Madeiros is a 15-foot-high structure made from reclaimed lumber. Snow Cone by Ryerson students Lily Jeon and Diana Koncan mimics an igloo and pine cone with touches of colour, and Hot Box looks foreboding but offers a cozy refuge from the winter chill. Also, designed by Timothy Olson was Wing Back. Wing Back has a concave shape which faces the southwest and corrals heat from the sun.

The winter stations will stay up until March 20, and I encourage you all to come down to the Beach and visit these imaginative structures. Thank you to the organizers, the contest winners and all of the artists who submitted their ideas. We look forward to supporting this as an annual tradition.

SOINS CONTINUS BRUYÈRE CONTINUING CARE

M. John Fraser: Je suis heureux d'intervenir aujourd'hui pour reconnaître le 170^e anniversaire de l'arrivée de Mère Élisabeth Bruyère à Ottawa.

I was pleased last Friday to join my colleagues the Attorney General and the government House leader at the celebration of the 170th anniversary of Mother Bruyère

coming to Ottawa. In her efforts to establish a school, a hospital, an orphanage and a home for the elderly, she laid the very foundation for the Bruyère Continuing Care that exists today.

Bruyère is now one of the largest health care institutions of its kind in Canada and has evolved into a complex continuing care network that includes Élisabeth Bruyère and St-Vincent hospitals, two family medical centres, multiple residences, a foundation and a research institute which works heavily in the fields of primary and palliative care. For generations, Bruyère has been providing compassionate, quality care with their ongoing commitment to advancing teaching, education and research.

Ils répondent aux besoins de la communauté diversifiée d'Ottawa, et de travailler ensemble avec les patients, les résidents et les familles à promouvoir un environnement bienveillant et favorable dans les deux langues officielles.

Congratulations to the staff and the volunteers at Bruyère Continuing Care. Most of all, thank you for caring for the people who we care for most.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

TAX FAIRNESS FOR REALTORS ACT, 2015 LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ FISCALE POUR LES COURTIERS EN VALEURS IMMOBILIÈRES

Mr. Smith moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 69, An Act to amend the Business Corporations Act and the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 with respect to personal real estate corporations / *Projet de loi 69, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés par actions et la Loi de 2002 sur le courtage commercial et immobilier relativement aux sociétés personnelles immobilières.*

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

First reading agreed to.

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

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Mr. Todd Smith: Again, it's called the Tax Fairness for Realtors Act, 2015. I'd like to welcome all the members from the Ontario Real Estate Association, who have been waiting a long time for this.

The bill amends the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act to permit a personal real estate corporation to be registered as a broker or salesperson. A personal real estate corporation must be incorporated as a professional corporation under the Business Corporations Act and be authorized only to trade in real estate.

In addition, the bill amends the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act to permit a brokerage to pay a

commission or other remuneration to the personal real estate corporation of an individual broker or salesperson that it employs.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Just before I get into my formal statement, I just want to thank all the First Nations, cottagers, municipalities, businesses, farmers, conservation authorities, water source protection groups, and environmental and community groups who were involved in drafting the proposals in this proposed legislation.

Last week, I had the privilege of introducing the proposed new Great Lakes Protection Act. The Great Lakes are vital to the health of Ontario's environment, to our economy and, of course, to our people. These beautiful lakes are unparalleled, holding one fifth of all the fresh water on earth. At a time when we are seeing this valuable resource under threat in other places around the world, our water wealth gives Ontario a significant competitive advantage.

However, there can be no doubt that the Great Lakes are also under stress. We are seeing increasing water quality problems, such as the harmful algae bloom in Lake Erie last summer. Invasive species threaten to undermine valuable fisheries and the quality of coastal waters and beaches. Land use pressures are degrading critical habitats such as coastal wetlands, and climate change is bringing the risk of significant changes to water levels, along with record storms and flooding that wash pollution into our lakes. Most significantly, many scientists now agree that the Great Lakes are actually at a tipping point of irreversible change if action is not taken now to restore ecosystem health.

Taking action is exactly what our proposed Great Lakes Protection Act sets out to do. The proposed Great Lakes Protection Act is designed to protect and restore our Great Lakes so they are drinkable, fishable and swimmable. If passed, it would give the province new tools to work with partners to protect and restore these important resources by ensuring action against the complex and increasing number of threats to the lakes, waters and shorelines.

The proposed act would establish a Great Lakes guardians' council to bring together municipal representation; representatives of First Nations and Métis communities; representatives from farming, tourism, industry, science and environmental communities; conservation authorities; and others with a stake in protecting the Great Lakes. The council would be a forum to identify Great Lakes improvement priorities, share information and help focus resources on addressing those priorities together.

The proposed act, if passed, authorizes the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to set targets to

address particular Great Lakes problems. For example, it would require at least one target for reducing algae blooms to be established within two years of the act coming into force.

The proposed act recognizes the importance of science in assessing the impact of stressors on the Great Lakes, identifying solutions and the need to continually assess our progress, adapt our actions and chart the way forward. The proposed act would ensure the establishment and maintenance of monitoring and reporting programs to improve understanding and management of the Great Lakes. It would increase reporting transparency and accountability by requiring that regular progress reports be tabled every three years in this Legislature; they would include reporting on performance measures and targets. It would also require that we consider traditional ecological knowledge that is offered by First Nations and Métis people as part of the decision-making process.

The proposed act, if passed, would enshrine Ontario's Great Lakes strategy in law as a living document to be reviewed every six years, and its progress reported on publicly every three years.

Many partners, as I mentioned before, were involved in drafting this. This is truly the work of the people of the Great Lakes.

This is the third time such a bill has been before this House. In developing the proposed strengthened Great Lakes Protection Act, we listened to the people of Ontario and the feedback we received from the opposition parties.

The people of this province understand that we need to protect and restore this immensely valuable resource.

I hope all members take pride in their contributions to this proposed legislation and will support the steps necessary to bring this bill forward. I look forward to working with all members of this House on this proposed bill as we move it through the legislative process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? The minister of northern affairs and mines.

MINING INDUSTRY

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak about the continued growth of the mineral development sector in the province of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, for over 130 years, northern Ontario has been intimately involved in the building of our province and country through the production of our natural resources. Whether it was driving North America's industrialization in the 20th century, welcoming new Canadians into our northern communities or expanding international trade, resource development has been a major part of the fabric of our province and our nation. I'm pleased to say that despite commodity and investment challenges that we're facing globally, Ontario's mining sector remains strong and competitive.

Innovation has been key to the success of mineral development in our province, Mr. Speaker. You'll be pleased to know, as I think all members of the House

will, that right here in Ontario, we are responsible for close to one quarter of Canada's total mineral production. In addition, Ontario is one of the world's top 10 jurisdictions for mineral investments and has been for many years.

There is no better place to celebrate and to promote Ontario's success in mineral development than at the annual Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada convention. Next week, on Monday, in fact, I will have the honour of officially opening the Ontario pavilion at this convention, which is attended by well over 25,000 delegates from more than 100 countries. I'm looking forward to sharing the story of the continued success of Ontario's mineral development sector with delegates from all around the world.

The bottom line is that when it comes to mining, the province of Ontario gets it right. Since 2003, the value of mineral production has risen from \$5.7 billion, a pretty impressive figure, up to \$11 billion in 2014—not bad. That makes Ontario the leading province in mineral production every year for the last decade. In fact, Ontario is the number one producer in Canada for an array of metals and minerals, including nickel, copper and platinum, among others.

Delegates at this convention are going to be learning about the significant impact the mineral development industry has had on the people of Ontario. For many, many people in our province, mining has quite literally transformed the way that they live.

There are approximately 900 mining supply and service companies that support the mining industry in our province. Together they directly employ 41,000 people and have an estimated direct economic impact of \$6.6 billion. That's the mining supply and service sector.

It's also an important fact to note—those who understand industry understand as well—that more global mining projects get financed in Toronto than in any other financial centre in the world. The Toronto Stock Exchange is the global leader in both mining equity capital raised and the number of mining companies listed on the exchange. It's pretty impressive. We currently have approximately 1,500 mining companies listed, \$240 billion in mining market capitalization and \$6.9 billion in new mining equity.

Speaker, there is no question that our province is a global mining force. The success of our industry is due to our commitment to drive innovation and collaboration in the mineral development sector—absolutely both key elements. It is this drive and determination that, may I say, is leading the development of the Ring of Fire.

The chromite deposit in the Ring of Fire is a momentous discovery, one of the largest known chromite deposits in the world, and it has a mineral potential that we believe to be worth more than \$60 billion.

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Last year, our government took a number of major and important steps to lay the groundwork for the development of this project, including the commitment of \$1 billion for strategic transportation infrastructure in the

region, a very remote part of the province, and establishing the Ring of Fire Infrastructure Development Corp. We've also very strongly strengthened our partnership with the First Nations through the signing of a historical framework agreement with the Matawa member First Nations.

We are very proud of these accomplishments and are continuing to work very closely with all interested parties on the opportunities for the development of the Ring of Fire.

Overall, we are so committed to sustaining a healthy mineral development sector. We're committed by supporting competitive regulatory and taxation policies and ensuring that our approach to mineral development balances the interests of all parties. That's always a real key to find that balance. This certainly includes respecting aboriginal and treaty rights, private landowners, public health, safety and the environment.

So next week, when the investors at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada convention, or PDAC, want to think of a secure, safe and successful jurisdiction to stake a claim, we want them to think of Ontario, because there is simply no better place to invest than right here in Ontario. We have the resources, we have the talent, and we have the passion.

To ensure that we build on this momentum, our government is working very hard. We're working on renewing Ontario's mineral development strategy. In the very near term—I think that means really soon—I will be sharing Ontario's plan to update the province's mineral development strategy, which will set out priorities to strengthen the sector and cement Ontario's position as a leading mining jurisdiction. With more than 30 advanced mineral exploration projects under way, it is truly an exciting time to be involved in mineral exploration and development in Ontario.

Next week I will speak with investors about Ontario's mineral development legacy and our future with some real pride. I invite all members to join me in speaking proudly about our mineral development industry in the province of Ontario and share our province's mining success stories. See you all at PDAC. Thank you very much—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. In the House, it is very appropriate to correct one's record and even I am not immune from that. I believe I introduced the minister as the minister responsible for northern affairs. I don't think he has to do all of that. It's the Minister of Northern Development and Mines—no affairs for you, Minister.

Statements by ministries?

It's now time for responses.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: As PC critic for environment and climate change, I'm honoured to stand before you today to respond to Bill 66, because growing up and now living a short distance from the shores of Lake

Huron, I recognize the importance of our Great Lakes and how crucial it is that we ensure their health, both now and in the future.

Ontario's west coast, Lake Huron, is a shared treasure in my riding. From the shoreline communities to across the countryside, it is a source of pride, with some of the best sunsets in the world. The Great Lakes are a mode of transportation as well. For instance, the Goderich harbour routinely sees commodities such as grains, oilseeds and minerals loaded onto lakers destined for locations beyond the sunset.

It is also a source of recreation and tourism and an economic driver in my riding. Here you can relax in the sun along the shorelines and take a hike along the trails, enjoy fishing or bird watching, or get active with cycling and canoeing.

I thank the municipalities, the communities and organizations who are already committed to being stewards of all of our Great Lakes.

On behalf of the riding of Huron—Bruce in particular, I would like to share with you that I also share in the minister's passion for ensuring we have a proactive approach to protecting our Great Lakes. However, in reviewing Bill 66, I must raise to the House my reservations and concerns surrounding this bill and if it can deliver on its promises.

First, the proposed guardians' council claims to be an open forum for participation and discussion, but when the minister is hand-picking who is invited to these meetings, it doesn't seem very open to me.

Further, I have serious questions surrounding the absence of funding to implement initiatives. After speaking with ministerial staff in a technical briefing, they were unable to indicate where money for initiatives would come from. I fear that these costs will be downloaded onto already overburdened municipalities.

Lastly, one of my biggest concerns is the amount of power afforded to initiatives yet to be determined by the minister's hand-picked council and their ability to override existing legislation. This has the potential for further erosion of municipal autonomy, just like we saw in the Green Energy Act.

Speaker, I have to tell you: To protect the Great Lakes, I share with the minister that we need to support local conservation efforts, promote environmental stewardship across all industries, and enable local municipalities to make smart planning decisions in their own communities.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Norm Miller: It is my pleasure to rise and respond to the comments by the Minister of Northern Development and Mines on behalf of the Ontario PC caucus and leader Jim Wilson.

I could be a little critical of some of his comments, especially the lack of progress on the Ring of Fire or our current ranking in terms of where Ontario is as to where it used to be. I do remember that it used to be number one. We're somewhere further down these days in the

various ranking systems. But I'm going to remain positive today, with PDAC happening.

The mineral exploration and development industry is a key contributor to the economy of our country and particularly here in Ontario. The industry is part of our national identity. The Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada make Toronto a worldwide destination for the industry during the first week of March every year. I'd like to congratulate them this year on the 83rd year of the convention.

The sheer number of people who attend annually is astounding, with over 25,000 individuals at the show in each of the past four years. Last year, I was particularly pleased that the Prime Minister was able to attend—the first Prime Minister ever to do so. I look forward to the opening speech by Finance Minister Joe Oliver this Sunday.

Annually, the convention adds millions of dollars to the Toronto economy—just ask those who conduct early exploration mine development—and it adds billions of dollars to the Canadian economy. The conference is as popular as ever—just ask anyone who has tried to book a downtown hotel during the days when PDAC is on.

We have a great mineral potential in the province of Ontario. I encourage the government to work to reduce the red tape in the prospecting and permitting process in Ontario so that we can realize that potential.

I look forward to the convention and to the continued commitment to supporting prospectors and developers in our great province. Again, please accept my congratulations, and all the best for another great convention in 2015.

GREAT LAKES PROTECTION

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No one questions the need to protect the Great Lakes and the watersheds that flow into the lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway. After all, Ontario borders on four of the five Great Lakes; 75% of the people in Ontario get their drinking water from the Great Lakes.

One thing that desperately needs to be changed, though, is legislation that allows companies to take our water for next to nothing and then sell it. Since 1961, companies taking more than 50,000 litres of water a day needed a permit. The government collects \$200,000 in annual permit fees, but it costs \$9.5 million a year to monitor and enforce this activity, and that should change. Water-bottling companies—indeed all 6,000 permit holders who do this—have to start paying their fair share, and it's only right. Seven years ago, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario was calling on the government to change this; the Drummond report also calls for that to change.

We also need to do more to reduce phosphorus levels in the Great Lakes. Phosphorus, nitrogen, manure—they all lead to algae blooms and threats to our watersheds. We need to pay more attention to radioactive materials

and to plans to bury this material on the shores of Lake Huron. We need to monitor any plans to ship radioactive material along the Great Lakes. We need to have a full environmental assessment before we even consider allowing oil from the Alberta tar sands to be pumped through aging pipelines near our Great Lakes. We need new shutoff valves on both sides of any lake, creek, brook or stream that pipelines would cross.

1340

Our Great Lakes are under constant threat. Purple loosestrife, zebra mussels, phragmites, Asian carp—there's a never-ending cavalcade of threats to our Great Lakes. These are threats to our drinking water, our commercial interests, our tourism, our economy and even our property values. We must do more to protect the watersheds and shoreline green spaces that are home to 4,000 species of plants, fish and wildlife.

In my area, in Windsor–Tecumseh, we promote the 100 Mile Peninsula as a retirement community. We're nearly surrounded by water, with affordable homes, marinas and waterside golf courses.

I'll remind the minister that in 2012 the Liberals said they would put \$52 million into the budget to protect and restore the Great Lakes. It didn't happen. They talked about it but didn't come through with the money.

We need, as Elvis used to say, “a little less conversation and a little more action,” or that famous Cuba Gooding Jr. line from that movie about sports agents with Tom Cruise, “Show me the money.”

It's a real issue, Speaker. We will work with the government to improve this bill, and we look forward to the opportunity to do so.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Mantha: As critic for northern development and mines for the NDP, I am pleased to rise and offer my comments. I won't be as positive as everybody else has been.

I would like to welcome the many mining industry people, companies and international government delegations who have come to Toronto to participate in the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada international mining conference, which starts this weekend.

Each year, these companies and government delegations from around the world come to Toronto to network, discuss issues, challenges, world trends and, hopefully, establish working relationships.

As mining is one of our economy's important engines, the province needs to pay more attention to the needs of the industry. Mining has created tens of thousands of jobs across the province, and there is an opportunity to do so much more. But in order for mining companies to come and invest in Ontario, they need to see that government has a clear, concrete plan for mining in this province.

PDAC is the stage which sets the tone for interest and investment in this province. This week in the NetNews-Ledger, the first page that comes out is, “Ontario Ranked

23rd in Mining Attractiveness,” and again, yes, I’m quoting the Fraser Institute. The article reads:

“The most attractive jurisdiction in the world for mining investment this year is Finland. The other top 10 ranked jurisdictions are Saskatchewan, Nevada, Manitoba, Western Australia, Quebec, Wyoming, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon and Alaska. Ontario was ranked 23rd, one spot above Alberta....”

At one time in 2013, we were 14th. In 2012, we were actually ninth. So in just three years, we have dropped 14 spots. We have gone from being in the top 10 most attractive places to 23rd. This is not a good-news story for the province, heading into PDAC.

The Ring of Fire offers First Nations, the north and the province huge economic opportunities and much-needed jobs.

As mining critic, I will continue to push this government to take action. It’s so obvious that we need a plan; we need a framework. Mining companies, First Nations, northern communities and citizens of this province want to see this project moving forward so that everyone can reap the economic benefits.

Again, I want to welcome PDAC delegates to Ontario, and I look forward to meeting with all of you next week.

PETITIONS

REALTORS

Mr. Todd Smith: This is a petition signed by real estate folks right across the province, from London to the GTA to Kingston. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario real estate salespeople are prevented by the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 from incorporating their businesses through a personal real estate corporation; and

“Whereas other regulated professions, including chartered accountants, lawyers, health professionals, social workers, mortgage brokers, insurance agents, architects and engineers, can all form personal corporations; and

“Whereas permitting real estate salespeople to incorporate would create jobs and increase government revenue;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Tax Fairness for Realtors Act, 2015 and give real estate professionals in Ontario the ability to form personal real estate corporations.”

I agree with this petition and I will pass it to the table with page William.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to present this petition that comes from, basically, Sudbury and Nickel

Belt. It reads as follows—and some of you have heard it before:

“Whereas the Ontario government has made” PET scanning “a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients...; and

“Whereas, since October 2009, insured PET scans are performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with Health Sciences North, its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly “to make PET scans available through Health Sciences North, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario.”

Those 200 people are added to the 28,000 people who have signed this petition, and it will be carried by Arlyne to the Clerk.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition to 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:”

That the Ontario government “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 sign it and leave it with page Fardin.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition from the Huntsville area for improved winter roads maintenance. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, as follows:

“Whereas there are an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 unpaid internships in Canada each year; and

“Whereas youth unemployment in Ontario is over 15%; and

“Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Labour is not adequately enforcing the laws on unpaid internships;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take the following actions:

“(1) Proactively enforce the law on unpaid internships;

“(2) Engage in an educational campaign to inform students, youth, employers, educational institutions and the general public of the laws surrounding unpaid internships; and

“(3) Undertake a comprehensive review of the current laws surrounding unpaid internships in Ontario.”

I fully support this petition, affix my name to it and will give it to page William to take to the table.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: It is a great pleasure to stand and support this petition alongside my colleague from Kingston and the Islands.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas:

“—some 3.1 million Ontarians have inadequate drug coverage or no drug coverage at all;

“—each year some 3,800 Ontarians die from prescription drugs taken exactly as prescribed and an additional 57,000 Ontarians experience serious unwanted side reactions; and

“—almost one fifth of new substances approved by Health Canada between 1995 and 2010 were later given serious safety warnings;

1350

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

“Urge the Minister of Health to include a universal pharmacare drug plan with first-dollar coverage in the Ontario Health Insurance Act;

“Make mandatory the reporting of the adverse effect of prescription drugs. We request that an independent drug monitoring agency be established with the power to remove unsafe drugs and issue actionable instructions to reduce the number of deaths by prescription drugs. We also request that such an agency be mandated to review on a 180-day priority basis all new prescription drugs, and

“Allow only evidence-based cost-effective drugs to be included on the list of plan-acceptable prescription drugs.”

It gives me great pleasure to sign it and give it to page Inaya.

TRESPASSING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is 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 on 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, and I give it to page Vaughn to return to the table.

NATURAL GAS RATES

Ms. Cindy Forster: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario Energy Board has agreed to grant Enbridge a rate increase of 40% on natural gas;

“Whereas consumer groups have requested special sessions to examine Enbridge’s application and the Ontario Energy Board denied the request;

“Whereas consumer bills will, on average, increase \$400—putting annual natural gas bills at \$1,400, up from \$1,000;

“Whereas families in the Niagara region cannot afford to pay the extra 40% on their natural gas bills;

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

“That, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Ministry of Energy issue a directive to the Ontario Energy Board to grant special sessions to review Enbridge’s application to increase natural gas prices by 40%.”

I support this petition, affix my signature, and will give it to page Arlyne.

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have a petition addressed 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 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.”

I agree with this petition, I am going to sign it, and I will be handing it over to page Victoria.

YOUTH SERVICES

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

“Whereas current provisions of the Child and Family Services Act prevent a children’s aid society from arranging temporary care for 16- and 17-year-olds who seek their assistance and have not been previously in care; and

“Whereas the inability to arrange care in a stable and nurturing family can expose youth to the risk of homelessness, criminality, poor education outcomes, and deteriorating physical and mental health; and

“Whereas at-risk 16- and 17-year-olds without care can impose a greater cost on social service providers than the cost of arranging for two years of temporary care; and

“Whereas the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies has repeatedly asked for 16- and 17-year-old youths to be able to seek CAS assistance regarding temporary care; and

“Whereas Bill 88 won all-party support during the 40th Parliament and was reported back to the House for third reading by the Standing Committee on Social Policy;

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

“To pass Bill 54, the Right to Care Act, by giving it second and third reading on March 5, 2015.”

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

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Percy Hatfield: “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 fully agree with this petition. I will affix my name to it and give it to page Niko to take up to the Clerk.

REALTORS

Ms. Laurie Scott: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario real estate salespeople are prevented by the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 from incorporating their businesses through a personal real estate corporation; and

“Whereas other regulated professions, including chartered accountants, lawyers, health professionals, social workers, mortgage brokers, insurance agents, architects and engineers, can all form personal corporations; and

“Whereas permitting real estate salespeople to incorporate would create jobs and increase government revenue;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Tax Fairness for Realtors Act, 2015 and give real estate professionals in Ontario the ability to form personal real estate corporations.”

I affix my signature and hand it to page Eileen.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was collected by Mr. Arthur Wilkie, from the beautiful community of Westree in my riding of Nickel Belt. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the NDP MPP for Timiskaming–Cochrane, John Vanthof, has introduced Bill 46 in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario so that UTVs (utility task vehicles) would be treated like all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) by the Highway Traffic Act;

“Whereas this bill to amend the Highway Traffic Act” passed second reading on February 19; and

“Whereas this bill will have positive economic impacts on clubs, manufacturers, dealers and rental shops and will boost revenues to communities promoting this outdoor activity,” like Westree;

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

“To vote in favour of MPP Vanthof’s Bill 46 to allow UTVs the same access as ATVs in the Highway Traffic Act.”

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

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The time for petitions has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AMENDMENT ACT (VOTING HOURS EXTENSION), 2015

LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES (PROLONGATION DES HEURES DE SCRUTIN)

Mr. Berardinetti moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 68, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 to keep voting places open until 9 p.m. / Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales pour que les bureaux de vote restent ouverts jusqu’à 21 h.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Berardinetti has moved second reading of Bill 68, An Act

to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 to keep voting places open until 9 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

1400

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by dedicating this bill, Bill 68, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 to keep voting places open until 9 p.m., to young people, to students, people in school, and the pages here today. It’s important that they understand what’s involved in the voting process and how democracy works. I think it’s very important that we debate that today.

These days, there are all kinds of distractions: social media, Google, Facebook, YouTube, emails, texting, and much more. Sometimes people get distracted or don’t focus on what’s really important.

I think that public service, either as a politician or as a civil servant, is something very important because what happens here or what happens in the federal Parliament or what happens in every city council affects people’s lives every day.

Earlier this week, we had a model Parliament. Students came in and were able to go through the process and understand the system. But it’s a lot different nowadays than it was before, as I mentioned, with all the distractions. This simple bill hopefully will bring some attention to how government works and whether or not to participate in that.

Today we’re debating a very simple thing: to keep municipal election voting places open until 9 p.m. instead of 8 p.m. Why is this important? We need to give every voter the opportunity to go out and cast their votes and exercise their civic rights. Furthermore, I think it’s important to start a conversation to make democracy more accessible to all.

Today, I want to hear from other legislators from all three parties and try to figure out how we create a conversation to increase participation in public office.

I hope this bill is sent to committee, where we’ll have an opportunity to hear from the public and to hear from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and from other civil servants and other members of the public, to get their points of view. Maybe they can amend or change the bill or suggest things so that people will be able to participate and have more voters coming out. We start that today. I fully expect it to hopefully go to committee and to come back up here for third reading debate.

In some countries—approximately 22—they have compulsory voting, which means that every registered voter has to vote or else he or she is fined or forced to do community service. Some of these countries are in South America, but one of the most interesting examples is Australia. Personally, I don’t think we should use that system, but I want to explain what it does. In Australia, everyone is registered to vote. On election day, they have to bring their voter registration card and vote. If they don’t, the government can do one of two things. They

can get a fine or they can be forced to do community work. So of course, voter turnout is really high—in the high 90s; 96%, 97%—depending on which election. That counts both for their federal elections and the various state elections inside Australia.

I personally don't agree because in our country we have a charter with fundamental rights, and one of those rights is freedom of expression. If we were to pass a law saying that everybody in Ontario who can vote has to vote, it would probably be challenged in court. I don't think judges would say that voting is more important than your freedom of expression. What we have to work on is trying to get people to participate, to come out and vote voluntarily, and not to force them to come out and vote.

Getting back to this bill: Provincial elections are open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Municipal elections in Ontario start at 10 a.m. and close at 8 p.m. That's a two-hour difference. Last year, in 2014, we had a provincial election in June and a municipal election in late October. I was involved in both. I had to gear up my campaign, and that election day was June 12. My wife is a city councillor, and her election was at the end of October. So right after my election, I was helping her a bit—not too much; she can do well on her own. But still, I noticed a difference in the timing and how elections came out.

People have various working hours and different lifestyles today than they had 20 or 30 years ago. Thirty years ago, people usually finished work and the family would gather around the dinner table at 5 or 6 p.m., and people would either vote after that or before that. Nowadays, people have various work schedules. They can work in the evening or in the morning—flexible hours, not just in work, but also for people who are going to school, those who are teachers and people who are involved in other activities across Ontario.

Mr. Han Dong: It's 24 hours.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes. One member here said that it's 24 hours of work and activities. So I think we need to create a time where people can actually say, "I'm going to go in my car or I'm going to walk to the polling station and cast my vote."

The other thing that we have instituted for quite a while is advance polling. Advance polling means that days are prepared before the election date and people can vote at the advance poll, and that's provincially, federally and municipally. Municipally, they've really tried hard to create a long period of time before the election date when people can go to the location and cast their vote. I think it's over a week long. People can vote either in the morning or until nighttime. I think we're trying to accommodate voters to come out and vote, but I think we can do more than that.

I want to mention a personal perspective on how important one vote is. I just need to spend a couple of minutes here talking about what happened to me in my first election on November 14, 1988.

I was running that day to become a city councillor for the city of Scarborough. Mr. Speaker, not to bring you into the conversation, but you also ran for the first time

and your election was the same day, November 14, 1988, for the same position, city councillor, but in a different ward. You were elected by just one vote more to avoid a recount, whereas I won by four votes and that automatically created recounts. So I had three recounts, and at the end of the day I won by one vote. So of all people, I can say one vote—

Mr. Steve Clark: They should call you Landslide Lorenzo.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yes. Well, I tell people now, "Your vote makes a difference." If someone had voted the other way, I probably wouldn't have gotten into politics in the first place.

But I'll just read the results, thanks to the library, who were able to provide me the results. Scarborough city councillor, ward 4, November 14, 1988: Lorenzo Berardinetti, 2,449; Kurt Christensen, 2,448; Ian Glynwilliams, 1,934; Bill Ward, 1,010; Darryl McDowell, 318; George Legault, 292. Those are the final results, and in the end I won by one vote. One single vote, again, made a difference. That's why every single election, I tell people, "You've got to come out and vote. Here's my story."

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It was your wife, man.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I wasn't married back then, in 1988. This was, like, 27 years ago.

Interjection: You were still a bachelor.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Yeah.

I can't explain the details—my time is very limited—but suffice it to say that the third recount took place on February 28, 1990, by a judge who recounted 27 ballots and determined that I won the election by one vote. I was happy that I won, but for the remaining time until the next election, which would be November 1991, everybody was approaching me and saying, "I got you elected." It got so ridiculous that I got a phone call from a gentleman one day who said, "You have to come see me because I got you elected. I voted for you, and so did my family, five other people." I went to his house, and it was a good two or three kilometres outside of my area. So I said to him, "You couldn't have voted for me." He goes, "Yeah, well, I found a way to vote for you anyways." So, again, it was kind of strange, but it was true.

I want to just review the results of what happened.

At the federal and provincial—Ontario—levels, we've seen a steady decline in voting.

1410

Back in 1867, 73.1% of people voted federally across Canada. In Ontario, in 1867, 73.9% of people voted. Nowadays, in the last federal election, on May 2, 2011, 61.1% voted. Provincially, they only had the results for October 6, 2011, but the result was 48.2%. That's less than half of all eligible voters who voted.

In the city of Toronto, they've made efforts to increase voter turnout, and it has worked. They increased the number of advance polls, as I mentioned earlier. In 2010, 50.55% voted, and last year, in 2014, 54.67% voted. There are various factors involved in that: They registered more voters, they advertised more and they had different ways of voting to encourage people to vote.

Still, though, it was 54.67%. The other part—let's say 50%—don't vote; they don't bother to.

So with this bill, I basically want to make sure that people come out and vote, and that their vote counts. I think that if we add one extra hour to municipal elections, maybe one person will come out and vote for someone and make a difference, like it did for me.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm glad to provide a few comments on the record, on Bill 68. I understand the concern here, especially for voters in the GTA who struggle to make it home on time from work because of this government's failure to address gridlock. So I support the idea of extending voting hours.

But I want to talk about two other amendments that I think need to happen to the Municipal Elections Act, which I support and frankly hope we can add to this bill in committee.

The first is from a member of the government side that they should be very familiar with, because it was an initiative championed by a former Liberal member, Jean-Marc Lalonde. He tabled a private member's bill to reduce the lame-duck period that exists for municipal councils from their election in late October to December 1, when councils are finally sworn in. As we all know, meetings just took place here in Toronto for the OGRA/ROMA conference. There are many, many municipal issues before them to deal with. They can't really wait a month, to be stuck in some lame-duck limbo before they get down to business.

In 2011, Mr. Lalonde's bill received all-party support, but like so many great initiatives by MPPs in private members' business on Thursdays, the bill basically didn't go anywhere after it received second reading.

The second change I'd like to see is eliminating the excessively severe penalty for municipal candidates who file their expenses after the deadline. For those who are unaware, even one day late triggers an automatic forfeiture of the person's council seat if that candidate was successful. There's also a prohibition from seeking municipal office in the subsequent election, whether the candidate was successful or not. This is far more severe, I would suggest, than would happen for any of us if we were late. As most members know, they can ask the Chief Electoral Officer for an extension, and it's normally granted. The penalty for a municipal election is far more severe.

This came up in my riding in 2010. My friend Earl Brayton, who is a councillor in the township of Elizabethtown-Kitley, had to go to court to earn a reprieve from the act, costing him a lot of money and a lot of time. So I committed to Earl that I would work to change it. I introduced petitions on his behalf. I wrote to ministers of the day, and I got their assurances that that would happen.

I actually wrote to Minister Jeffrey in October 2013 to remind her that the window to amend the act prior to the 2014 municipal election was closing. You know what she

told me? She told me not to panic. She said they had plenty of time. But we all know that no amendments were made to the act last year for the elections; neither was my request to change the late filing or expense period—that Mr. Lalonde's bill would have done for the lame-duck period.

So I guess I have a message to the member for Scarborough Southwest: I say to you that I support your bill, and you can count on my support to try to push some of those other amendments that we need to the Municipal Elections Act. Thank you very much for your bill, and I look forward to supporting it.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to rise, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to join the debate on Bill 68, the voting hours extension act, introduced by the member for Scarborough Southwest.

This is a short bill. In fact, I think it's one of the shortest bills I've seen since I was first elected. It revises the Municipal Elections Act to extend voting hours from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. Certainly, it's hard to argue against this change. Making it easier for people to exercise their right to vote is always a good thing: making it easier for people to participate in the democratic process, making it easier for people to cast a ballot and have a say on what happens in their community. There is research to show that making voting more convenient does encourage more people to vote. So it is possible that keeping the polls open one hour longer could increase voter turnout in municipal elections. But research also shows that this kind of reform, this kind of tinkering around the edges, has only a limited and marginal impact. The bill is not a game-changer for democratic participation—not by any stretch of the imagination.

What would be a game-changer—what would really invigorate and strengthen local democracy—is proportional representation. The problem is not that the polls close at 8 p.m.; the problem is the system of voting, whether at the municipal, provincial or federal level. The problem is the winner-takes-all or first-past-the-post system, which has the same basic flaws at every level of government.

People don't feel that their votes count. People don't feel that their issues matter. This is particularly the case for young people, who were mentioned by the member for Scarborough Southwest. People don't like the negative and adversarial campaigning that goes along with first-past-the-post. Most importantly, too often the people who get elected do not reflect the diversity of the people they represent.

The solution for these flaws is proportional representation. A study of 36 democracies over 55 years found that countries using proportional voting systems had a 7.5% increase in voter turnout. They had government policies that were more reflective of the median voter. They had citizens who felt more satisfied with democracy, even when their candidate or their party did not win. Most importantly, they had an 8% increase in the number of women elected.

Why is it important to elect more women? Because we make better decisions when we hear a diversity of views, when we have different people around the table bringing different experiences and perspectives to bear on the issues at hand. We know that many of the policies we talk about in this place have very different impacts on women, compared to men. Women continue to earn 30% less than men. They continue to be overrepresented in minimum wage jobs. They continue to be involuntary part-time workers because they can't get child care. They continue to experience violence from male abusers.

After the last election provincially, it was encouraging to see that we are making progress here in Ontario. We are electing more women, even under first-past-the-post. I'm especially proud that within the NDP caucus, we elected a majority of women MPPs, a first for Ontario and, I believe, for Canada. However, it will take years, even decades at the rate we are going, to achieve gender parity, with women holding 50% of elected offices in Canada. When we look to Europe, we easily see that the best way, the surest way to get more women elected is through proportional representation.

During the last Parliament, my former NDP colleague Jonah Schein proposed an alternative voting system for the city of Toronto. Many of you were here in this Legislature for the debate about a ranked ballot system. Even though the legislation was specific to Toronto, I have to tell you that the possibility of changing the way citizens vote in municipal elections in Ontario galvanized people in my riding of London West. I must have received over 100 emails from constituents who were eager for change and excited by the prospect of electoral reform, excited by the prospect of engaging more citizens and building a stronger democracy.

The last time electoral reform was on the table in Ontario was in 2003, when the Liberals formed a citizens' assembly to look at alternatives to first-past-the-post. After consulting widely, the assembly proposed mixed member proportional representation, which would have allowed voters to vote for both the candidate and the party, the system that is currently in place in Germany and New Zealand.

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The referendum on the proposal was, unfortunately, completely botched by both the Liberal government and Elections Ontario. With minimal budget, no real effort was put into educating the public about the proposal and about the issues involved, and as a result, the referendum failed.

By all means, let's go ahead and keep municipal polling stations open one hour longer. We certainly don't oppose this bill, but I have to say we are very disappointed by the missed opportunity this bill represents.

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

Mr. Granville Anderson: Thank you to the member from Scarborough Southwest for bringing this bill forward with the best of intentions. I also wish to thank the members from Leeds-Grenville and London West for their comments.

I must say I echo the sentiment of this bill and the democratic spirit that it encourages.

As members of this assembly, we know the importance of working with governments at all levels, and we understand the importance of the responsibilities at every level. As provincial politicians, we sit between municipalities and the federal government, striking a balance between the two. In our ridings, we see first-hand the impact of the decisions made at the municipal level, and so we know that our constituents must have ample opportunity to elect their municipal representatives. Municipal politics are significant, and they must be afforded voting hours akin to those that we find at the provincial and federal levels.

In Durham, I often say that we are Ontario writ small, in that our diversity and demographics reflect an image of our entire province.

The boundaries of my riding encompass three municipalities within the region of Durham: Uxbridge, Scugog and Clarington. Each of them would benefit in slightly different ways from an extension of the voting hours.

As the eastern anchor of the greater Toronto area, and sitting along the 401 on its southern border, Durham has a significant number of commuters, of which I am one: men and women, parents with new families and grandparents with established families, business people and community leaders—average people with very busy lives. They all spend significant amounts of time before and after work commuting into the city and returning home later than they would probably like.

As a commuter myself and a daily passenger on the GO train, I can attest that no matter how comfortable my journey, I return home to my family at an hour too close to 8 o'clock to consider doing much else, let alone travelling to a polling station and voting.

My constituents should be afforded the time to return home, to tend to their families and the needs in their homes, and still have enough time to make important decisions at a municipal polling station.

Of course, commuters are not alone in needing more time for voting. Durham, much like other urban-rural ridings on the fringes of large cities, is chosen as the home for many in retirement. Many older Ontarians who do not have the mobility that they require often seek the assistance of family members or transportation services to go about their daily lives. This adds time to the day, and can mean the difference between having enough time to vote and missing an opportunity.

This sentiment is heard from younger Ontarians as well, who have after-school programs, sports and important social lives.

The modern lifestyle at all ages is simply too evenly paced, and we must make sure that our democratic systems do not get overlooked in the hustle and bustle.

I would like to thank the member from Scarborough Southwest again for bringing this bill to the House. While I acknowledge its challenges, I look forward to supporting it in the best interests of my constituents and all Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, I travel over an hour and a half some days to get back to my riding. Sometimes I leave this place way after 6. It's very difficult, really, to make it to a polling station in time to observe my democratic right, and that's something I take seriously. I never miss an opportunity to vote.

Again, all Ontarians should be afforded the same opportunity to vote, so I wholly support extending the hours by an additional hour.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm happy to stand on behalf of my constituents and the PC caucus to talk on this bill.

I think, especially in the GTA, with all of the traffic concerns and so many bedroom communities and commuters, we all support giving people an extra hour to vote. But we also have to recognize that there are a lot of volunteers working on election day, and it's an extra hour for all of us involved in elections to find those volunteers, keep them fed, keep them happy till they wrap up and observe and do their scrutineering. It definitely makes the day go longer. As well, for people at home who are anxiously waiting for the election results along with all the media outlets, it means adding another hour of waiting for them. So we have to recognize that and look at why we're considering extending the hours to vote.

There are advance election opportunities for people. Oftentimes there's proxy voting and things like that, but it's not very well understood. I think a lot more can be done to educate the public on their options and to maybe encourage more people to vote in advance.

I know that I've had supporters, constituents in our riding, go to vote on advance voting days or at the official Elections Ontario office, and they were asked, "Are you going to be away on election day?" They said, "No. I just want to get it out of the way." Maybe they want to volunteer or they don't want to take a chance that they might be busy. They're told, "Really, advance voting is for people who are not available to vote on election day." Maybe we have to change that kind of thinking. Maybe we have to have more advance voting opportunities to make it easier, and actually encourage people to vote in advance instead of making them think that they should wait till election day.

We all know there are people who want to wait till the last minute because they're not sure how they're going to vote.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Well, it's traditional. We like to vote on the day.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Exactly. It's a tradition. People do like to vote on election day. They feel like they're more a part of being engaged and knowing what's going on.

I've also heard from people who are concerned that their vote will get lost if they vote in advance.

Maybe we have to reassure people a little bit more.

In terms of who we think we're going to encourage, it remains to be seen if we'll get a higher youth turnout or a higher senior turnout. Maybe there are different reasons

why they're not voting and they don't feel engaged in the process.

At York University, they now allow voting for my riding of Thornhill on the campus. The campus is not in my riding, but they recognize that many of the students at the university live in the riding and that would encourage voter turnout, which it does, I believe.

The same thing can be said for the downtown core. Maybe we could have, with computers, specially trained Elections Ontario staff in the downtown core, which would allow people from all over the province who may be downtown on business or commuting or visiting to be able to vote at some well-advertised locations for any riding, so that they don't have to run home to their riding. The reality is, if you have an event on a Thursday evening, just extending the voting by an hour doesn't help people. They're not going to go back to their riding in the 905 and then come back downtown for an event.

This is one small problem that challenges us to increase voter turnout. It challenges us to get people more engaged, and it challenges us to work a little harder at looking at other options, including online voting. If you can now deposit a cheque online using a smart phone taking a picture and the banks can manage to have secure software, I don't see a reason why Elections Ontario can't work with all of us here in the Legislature at finding ways to have secure online voting.

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Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I really want to commend everybody who is speaking in support of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member for Welland.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Thank you, Speaker. It's an honour to rise here in the House today and to speak to this bill. As we know, the bill actually amends subsection 46(1) of the Municipal Elections Act to extend the municipal voting by one hour. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The NDP supports changes that will give voters more access to democracy, access to voting. The extra hour, from 8 to 9, will help those who work shift work, perhaps. A nurse, for example, who works until 7:30 or 8 o'clock at night may now get to the polls. I can tell you that we had a lot of debate trying to get nurses to the polls in the day when I was actually doing that kind of work.

That sort of change is welcome, a first step in electoral reform. On the subject of reform, however, New Democrats have long supported changes that would ensure that our electoral systems on all levels of government are not only more accessible, but representative of our electorate, although I'm curious to understand and appreciate why the member from Scarborough Southwest is actually using a private member's slot to pass legislation, as opposed to the government just bringing this forward as a government bill. Why doesn't the government just do it if it's so important? It's a very easy bill that I'm sure the government could pass in a week or two here.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Oh, I wouldn't count on that.

Ms. Cindy Forster: Well, I wouldn't count on it either, Mr. Bradley.

As you know, almost a year ago, New Democrats introduced a bill that would have allowed the city of Toronto to create an alternate voting system. The bill was in support of a local city of Toronto resolution—you know, a city that has millions of people—to establish a ranked balloting voting system as well as a proportional representation system.

As we know, the ranked system is one where voters number their choice of candidates. If no candidate wins 50%, the voters then have a second and third choice, until that candidate actually receives 50% of the vote.

Ranked ballots ensure the electoral representative has received the support of a majority of voters. It motivates candidates to achieve greater success, to cast a wider net, and it restores faith in the democratic process.

Ranked ballots also eliminate the dilemma of strategic voting, something we often see happen at all levels of government, most recently in the provincial election back in May. By ensuring that voting matters and that their votes won't ultimately go to waste, voters are more likely, I think, to come out and vote for the person that they want to win, as opposed to voting because of fear.

It was good to see the member from Scarborough–Guildwood replicate the New Democratic bill, though her bill eliminated the proportional representation component of it; it did not have that included in the bill. New Democrats, of course, supported the bill nonetheless.

The PR system is an electoral system in which political parties are only able to gain support in direct proportion to the number of votes cast for them. According to Fair Vote Canada, Canada has had 16 majority governments at the federal level since World War I, and yet a mere four of those have won a majority of the popular vote. I think that's a bit of a troubling statistic. Around the world, Germany, the Netherlands, Brazil and 78 other democracies use some form of PR during their elections that vote in their national assemblies.

More so, over the last decade, 10 different commissions, assemblies and reports have all recommended that we reform our systems to include proportional representation, and rightfully so, but we have yet to do anything about it.

On the provincial level, in this most recent election, only 38.6% of voters voted for this Liberal government, and Ontario saw a voter turnout of only 52%. That's just over half of eligible voters. Of them, of those voters in the last election, four out of five people did not vote for this Liberal government, and yet the party still received 54% of the seats. That is very unfortunate.

According to Elections Ontario, 31,000 voters formally declined their ballots in this election, compared to a mere 2,300 in 2011. It is a very disturbing number, and we, as legislators and elected officials, should feel that that's a very strong message coming to us. Instead, we continue to have a declining voter turnout on all levels of government, and a jaded electorate that is cynical, untrusting and skeptical of our electoral system.

In closing, New Democrats are proud to be able to get up and speak to this initiative. We hope that we continue to implement positive reforms that will bring our electoral systems up to speed with those around the world. These reforms are necessary and imperative before we can see any hope of turning around the voter turnout numbers and restoring faith into the people who put us in these seats in the first place.

I think it's very important that we continue to talk about these issues. I know that in the last four years, I've had people in my office each year to talk about proportional representation and to talk about ranked balloting. Certainly, that ranked balloting piece was almost there the last time around. Unfortunately, it didn't quite make it back into this Legislature. There were committee hearings, and it didn't make it back.

I think it's incumbent on the government to be actually listening to the people of this province when it comes to electoral reforms. Let's move this piece of legislation forward so that it's in place in a timely way.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I want to also thank the members who have stood up in this House to speak about this very important private member's bill: the members from Leeds–Grenville, London West, Durham, Thornhill and Welland.

I want to start off by saying that I do agree with the member from London West when she says that we need to elect more women into government. I'm very proud to say that I am the first woman elected in the riding of Davenport.

I also agree with the member when she says that we need to also have a more diverse government. I'm extremely, extremely proud of our Liberal caucus and how diverse we are, representing what is truly our province and all of the various colours, religions, backgrounds, sexual diversity—everything that we have in our province, we have here on this side. So I'm very proud of our Liberal caucus.

I have to agree with the member from Thornhill when she says that we do need to do a little bit more—and perhaps do a lot more—in terms of educating people on advance polls and how important it is to get people out on advance polls.

However, I don't agree with her argument that if we were to have this private member's bill passed, we would need more volunteers on E-Day. Her argument for advance polls is pretty much the same here: We would also need to have more volunteers helping out at the advance polls. That's one of the things I don't agree with.

Ranked ballots: Members from the third party talked about ranked ballots. I just want to commend the member from Scarborough–Guildwood and all the work that she did in trying to put forth a bill that would actually address the issue of ranked ballots. Unfortunately, we had to go to an election, because members from the opposite side did not want us to pass what we wanted to pass at the time, so that fell off. Had we not had this election, we

probably would have had that private member's bill already as law.

Today we are here to talk about my colleague from Scarborough Southwest and the private member's bill that he has presented here today. I want to thank him for bringing forth this important bill. Thank you for putting forward this important piece of legislation, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 to keep voting places open until 9 p.m., which I'm very proud to speak on today.

Mr. Speaker, our democratic system underpins everything we do here in the Legislature. The reason we are here today is because constituents from all of our ridings exercised their democratic right to entrust us with these positions. Voting is tantamount to democracy, and as elected officials, it is of absolute importance for us to encourage voting in any way that we can.

Indeed, much is often said about the troubling trend of low voter turnout. I think it is really our obligation to allow as many people as possible to come out and to exercise their democratic right. One of the primary ways for us to promote voting is really simply by making the polls more accessible to as many eligible voters as we can.

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The member from Scarborough Southwest's initiative takes important steps to tackle this issue by doing just that. By keeping municipal polls open from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m., we open the democratic system to a much greater pool of potential voters.

If we look at my riding of Davenport, the utility of such a legislation certainly becomes apparent. Davenport is such a diverse riding, which incorporates a very wide variety of different voters. Whether it is the elderly citizen, blue collar workers or the young professional on west Queen West, I'm always impressed by how active and engaged so many of my constituents are with their local issues.

However, my constituents, due to their varied obligations, all find difficulties making it to the polls on election night. Working to resolve these difficulties would in turn work to open up our democracy to even more voices. In particular, the elderly in my riding, in the areas like Corso Italia or Little Portugal, find it difficult to reach the polls and, as such, find voting as something difficult.

Even young people see a disconnect from the ballot box, in part because they are unable to find time to vote after studying all day and working multiple jobs, or after a long commute home. How many people here in this House know how long it takes to commute from one place to the other in this city, and it does take a long time, having to run to catch trains etc. A lot of people in my riding who have to take a lot of transit to get places in the downtown core are finding it very difficult to get to the polling stations for 8 p.m.

Many families call Davenport their home, and these are often young working families with small children. In many scenarios, the fact that there is an election does not rank as a top priority for such busy individuals. Whether

it's in the northern part of my riding by Eglinton Avenue, or in the condos by Queen Street West, election night is filled with a great deal of confusion unrelated to the casting of one's ballot.

In young families, both parents may work all day, and when they come home they need to worry about picking up their children, preparing dinner and spending quality time with their family. After all these duties are properly attended to, it's often the case that, before you know it, it's 8:30 at night and the polls are closed. I'm sure that this is often the case for many of my constituents where, for the average person, voting is not prioritized over all of these extremely important obligations.

I have two young boys, and I know that when I get home, that's what my end of day is like: trying to make sure that they've done their homework, that they've studied, that they have their backpacks ready for the next day and we've got lunches on the go, after cleaning up the kitchen and getting the kids down to bed. It's a very, very busy household.

For a lot of people, it isn't just apathy in the political system that leads to them not casting their ballots; it really is the busyness of the daily lives.

The need for this legislation certainly cuts across all ages and employment. While there will be a cost to paying election workers for an additional hour, and the volunteers, in my view, if this means more people will vote, then it is worth it. We as elected officials must work to address the issue of low voter turnout.

Thank you again to the member from Scarborough Southwest for bringing this important issue to the Legislature here today. I'm happy that I could put my voice in support of this bill and I look forward to further debate on this bill. Thank you.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's a pleasure to rise today and add a few comments to this debate. As others have indicated, I'm certainly going to support the motion and give commendation to the member for making this kind of change, or at least moving in that direction.

I think that what this bill does is serve to remind us about how lifestyles are changing and that, while voting is something that, fortunately, in this culture has been around for quite a while, we have to keep up with the times—literally, keep up with the times. Voting opportunity, then, has to reflect that kind of change in time.

People have mentioned the advance polls and things like that. Personally, I think that that kind of flexibility in voting is an extremely important element of making voting accessible to people.

Democracy is a fragile system. It needs a lot of tending, it needs a lot of integrity, and it needs a lot of action to make sure that we have a healthy democracy. One of the least invasive expressions of that is, of course, to show up and vote.

There was a time not so long ago where you could tell the time by the activities going on in the community. The schools all got out at the same time. People left their

offices and workplaces at the same time. With that kind of very strong rhythm, you could also have a reflection of the polling time as being very rigid. But over the years, we've seen that kind of predictability of people's lifestyles challenged considerably. Stores hours are up to 24 hours a day, but they're certainly very flexible, and family life reflects that change. Work schedules can be varied. The question of transportation—being able to get home in time to vote—is reflected in this private member's bill. I think it's really part of that whole process of dynamism in our community and lifestyle today, which is really 24/7.

I want to end on an interesting historical note, and that is that a couple of hundred years ago it wasn't uncommon for people who were running for office to offer drinks in the local tavern. That would encourage people to have a better view of how they should vote. There was quite a long period of time when this was allowed, and there was a great deal of urgency that came about to restrict that. There was a time in Ontario when the bars had to close a few hours before the end of voting.

Reflect back on this time a couple of hundred years ago, when in fact people were making sure that they could encourage voting in a certain direction. The whole history of voting hours is a reflection on our community and our lifestyle. For that reason, it should continue to reflect our lifestyle and make those hours more conducive to the current lifestyle that people have.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member from Scarborough Southwest. You have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When I began this conversation and debate earlier, I said that I hope it goes to committee and that there's more conversation. Listening to all the speakers today, from Leeds, London West, Durham, Thornhill, Welland, Davenport, York-Simcoe—and I apologize if I missed someone's riding—they all have different aspects to add to this. I appreciate that very much, and I hope it goes to committee and becomes part of a larger conversation, because life has changed a lot.

I just wanted to mention one thing—while I was listening—in 1995, I had the opportunity, as a Scarborough city councillor, to travel with the mayor to China—actually, various parts of Asia, but we were in China and Beijing. We had a tour that day and we were sent back to our hotel rooms. I slipped out by myself and decided to take a look at Tiananmen Square. All of a sudden, there was a guy who came up behind me. He was part of the delegation. He said, “What are you doing?” I said, “I'm just taking a walk.” He goes, “Why are you taking a walk?” I said that I just wanted to look around. “I'm going to have to join you here.” I said, “Why?” He goes, “That's the way our party works, so I'm tagging along.” Then he asked some questions. He goes, “You're so young. How did you get elected?” I said that I ran for office. He just scratched his head, and he said to me, “In China, the politicians are older men, in their sixties and seventies. How old are you? Thirty years old? What are

you doing here?” I thought how fortunate it is that we have the opportunity to exercise our votes and that anyone can run for office. Any one of us can run for office. We all ran. We have different backgrounds. We come together and we debate. This is private members' time, so we don't have to vote along party lines.

I really appreciate all the comments that were made here. All I want to do is make the system a little bit better. That's all. There are so many ways to improve it. It will always be better than what they have in some countries, like China.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take the vote on this item at the end of regular business.

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UTILITY TASK AND ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LES AUTOQUADS ET LES VÉHICULES POLYVALENTS

Mr. Norm Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 58, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to utility task and all-terrain vehicles / Projet de loi 58, Loi modifiant le Code de la route en ce qui concerne les autoquads et les véhicules polyvalents.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to rise to debate Bill 58, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to utility task and all-terrain vehicles.

Over the past number of years, I've had countless inquiries from constituents wondering where they are able to drive their utility task vehicles in particular. In the fall of 2013, I was happy to put forward the notion in the PC white paper A Champion for Northern Jobs and Resources. In November, over a year ago, I was pleased to speak to the motion that was put forward by the member from Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, which received unanimous support in the Legislature. That was well over a year ago.

To give a little bit of background, the rules regarding ATVs, all-terrain vehicles, are very specific, and they come from 2003. The definition of an ATV is a vehicle that has four wheels, carries one person and that you straddle—so quite specific. The rules in Ontario allow for an ATV to be used on some designated provincial highways, and otherwise it's up to municipalities.

The more rural municipalities tend to be freer in terms of allowing use of ATVs. For example, in the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, in Parry Sound district, which is more rural, all the municipalities—I think with the exception of the town of Parry Sound, which is more urban—allow ATVs pretty much anywhere on the roads. In most cases, that's small back roads, little dirt roads. In the district of Muskoka, it's a little more of a patchwork;

I think the only municipality that allows ATVs anywhere is the township of Georgian Bay.

In the last couple of years, some of the bigger towns like Bracebridge and Gravenhurst have designated certain parts of the towns where they allow ATVs. For example, I happen to live a half-hour drive from the urban part of Bracebridge, but still in the town. Under the current rules, you can actually ride an ATV on the provincial highway that goes by out to that area; it's one of the designated provincial highways. But until the town of Bracebridge, just last year, said that you could ATV on the dirt roads in the area of Vankoughnet, where I live, you couldn't actually ride on the smaller municipal roads. That's changed, but that's up to the municipalities, as it should be.

However, as I mentioned at the beginning, the definition of an ATV is very specific: just one person. In recent years, we've seen the development—in the last 10 years, there have been all kinds of UTVs that have been developed that are side-by-side, where you can carry two or three people. They may have bucket seats; they may have a bench seat. They tend to have a pickup box in the back so that you can carry loads of firewood or whatever else you might want to carry. I would say also, with the development of all those vehicles, if anything, they're probably safer in most cases than a traditional ATV, and they probably have more appeal to, say, seniors who might find it difficult to ride a traditional ATV or people who just want to use them for more work purposes.

But the way the rules stand right now, if you happen to live in, say, Kearney, north of Huntsville in Parry Sound district, and you're on some small dirt road, you could drive your ATV down the road to access a woodlot, but you can't drive the UTV.

This bill is about expanding the definition of ATVs to include utility task vehicles. Those would be vehicles like a Polaris Ranger or—there are various different models made, by Bombardier, Honda, Kawasaki and Argo. The member from Kitchener–Conestoga has made sure I'm aware that Argos, which are vehicles that have either six or eight wheels and are kind of an amphibious vehicle made right here in Ontario—he wanted to make sure that the definition of UTV included those vehicles.

In most cases, being able to use a road is just to be able to access a trail. So as I say, if it were me, I might have a 100-acre lot down the road that I want to cut firewood on. I want to be able to drive legally down the dirt road to access that woodlot and then come back without breaking the law. Certainly for the hunting population out there, it would be a case of being able to access the trails or to go between trails—in most cases, a relatively short distance on the roads. People don't want to be riding them on the roads other than to access trails, in most cases, or to access woodlots. It could be hunters who want to access hunting trails and locations. It might be a farmer who wants to get to another side of his property and needs to go down a side road. It could be a golf course that needs—to go drive down the road a little bit. There are various different situations.

The rules to do with some vehicles are a little grey. I noticed even around Queen's Park here, they have some vehicles like—I think it's a John Deere; I don't know the name of the actual vehicle, but it's a UTV. They have a Kubota RTV that they use for salting around the precinct. It could be considered, under the current rules, an instrument of husbandry, in which case, if it has a slow moving vehicle sign, it may be legal, but it's kind of in a grey area. I know a few years back the Kubota dealership in Bracebridge was just transporting their Kubota RTV to the Bracebridge Fall Fair, assuming that it was legal under the rules to do with an instrument of husbandry, with a slow-moving vehicle sign on it, and they got ticketed by the OPP.

For the people buying these, we need to have some clarity, and we currently don't. So that's what this private member's bill is about. It's about providing more access—and I see the time is slipping by quickly, so I would like to read some quotes that I have received in support of the private member's bill. In particular, I received from ATV Ontario Tourism—that is Andrew Ryeland, who happens to be in the Parry Sound area and operates Bear Claw Tours. He wrote, "ATV Ontario Tourism Initiatives Inc. ... is encouraged to see MPPs from all parties expressing the will to update Ontario's out-of-date off-highway vehicle regulations. Members like Norm Miller know how important off-highway vehicles are to the economic prosperity of their ridings." It's from Andrew Ryeland, president of ATV Ontario Tourism Initiatives. He operates Bear Claw Tours. He does a big event in the spring each year called Spring Jam. I know he also—I've seen it on his website—uses Honda side-by-side UTVs as well in his business.

We have a quote from the Canadian Off-Highway Vehicle Distributors: "COHV supports all responsible efforts to more equitably treat owners and riders of all types of off-highway vehicles. In this regard we strongly support the private members' bills brought before the Legislature related to more equitable access. Off-road riding is a healthy, family recreation and it contributes significantly to the economy of Ontario." It's from Bob Ramsay, president of COHV.

I've had a lot of letters from the Ontario Federation of Trail Riders, quite a few letters. I'll just summarize a few of them. They want to be included in this legislation. If this bill passes, I would recommend that they come before committee, if it gets before a committee, and/or participate in the review of off-road vehicle safety in Ontario, which was just announced yesterday by MTO, the Ministry of Transportation. They write, "We are happy to support Bill 58 both in its non-partisan spirit and the sound reasoning behind it."

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"Additionally, the Ontario Federation of Trail Riders encourages further enhancements to this bill that would include licensed and insured off-road motorcycles and other recreational vehicles. Our experience has shown that there is a real need to develop improved highway access legislation that serves all types of off-road recrea-

tional vehicles, for practical, economic and safety reasons, as well as much-simplified administration and enforcement.”

They go on; I don't have time to read it. That was from Brian Knechtel, president of the Ontario Federation of Trail Riders.

I see I'm down to almost two minutes, so I'm not going to be able to cover all the points that I wanted to.

I did want to mention that I think Ontario has a lot to learn from Quebec on this file. Currently, the rules in Quebec do allow UTVs on roads. They actually have a network of trails. They even plow the trails in the winter-time for UTVs and ATVs; I'm not sure whether that necessarily makes sense. But I would say, generally, on the trail issue, Quebec does a much better job with trails: with snowmobile trails, with ATV trails, with cycling trails. They have the Route verte that covers the whole province and is also used for snowmobile trails in the wintertime.

I can see I'm down to a minute, so I won't be able to tell my whole story.

I had the pleasure of snowmobiling around the Gaspé, in Quebec, the first week of February. Because they have this fine network of trails, and enough users, it creates a critical mass so that you then have the accommodations and the restaurants, to make for a pleasant experience for somebody who wants to visit the area. I would simply say that we could learn from what Quebec is doing. There, even in the small, little towns, you'll see people pull up in a UTV, park at a restaurant and go in and eat there.

I think it's time to update the rules here in the province of Ontario. I've heard from many members on this side of the Legislature who support this: the member from Huron–Bruce, who told me she has heard from a lot of constituents; the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock; the member from Leeds–Grenville; and certainly the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, who wanted to put in a good plug for Argo.

I look forward to debate on this issue. I think it is time to update the rules. I was pleased to see announced just yesterday that MTO is starting a process to try to get some input on it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's a great pleasure. I get a chance to yet again speak to this issue, because this is not the first time, this is not the second time and this is not the third time. I think it might be more than three times that this particular issue has come to the Legislature.

Listen, this is a no-brainer, as was said last week when my colleague the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane raised this in the House. These particular vehicles are actually safer than the ATVs that I have; I've got a quad. These particular vehicles, I would argue, are a lot safer and afford an opportunity for people to be able to use these things for everything from clearing the snow on their driveways to hauling the garbage to the dump to taking a ride out with your loved one out on a nice dirt

road somewhere, to enjoy the outdoors of northern Ontario or southwestern Ontario or wherever you might live in this beautiful province, to go fishing, partridge hunting or whatever it might be. These particular vehicles, I would argue, are a much safer vehicle than others out there that are available for people to be able to cruise the bush with.

The example was used where a number of people have used these in order to put a plow in front of them, to plow their driveway. There have been a couple of examples where the person is on their property but has to back out onto the road in order to clear the entrance of their driveway, and they get charged because the wheels end up touching the highway or end up touching the municipal road. Clearly, this is something that's got to be fixed.

The good news is that we know, as a result of the pressure that was put on by the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, and now the pressure put on by the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka and others before, that finally the government is moving on doing a consultation in regard to regulatory change that will, hopefully, lead to these particular vehicles being used.

I can tell you that was greeted in northern Ontario with applause, quite frankly. I know that I heard from my constituency staff and others that across northern Ontario, the news got out yesterday that the government is looking at changing the regulatory part of this in order to allow them to be used. The media across northern Ontario has been quite supportive in thanking Mr. Vanthof the week before, and I'm sure they will do the same for Mr. Miller this time around for actually getting this thing done.

I think it's a good demonstration of what can happen at private members' hour. It's not just the government that has the good ideas. Members of this assembly from all sides of the House have good ideas that they bring to the floor. In most cases, when you bring a private member's bill, you're very, very lucky if you actually get your private member's bill passed and enacted into law. Normally, they will get second reading. You might be lucky and get some committee hearings. You may even get third reading. But enactment of a private member's bill sometimes doesn't even happen after third reading, because normally a government wants to do it themselves. Well, you know what? If the government wants to do this, let's do it and let's do it right. Let's make sure that we consult with those people that need to be consulted with and do this thing because it is the right thing to do.

Je peux vous dire qu'il y a beaucoup de monde dans mon comté, dans la région de Timmins, Hearst, Kapuskasing, Smooth Rock et d'autres, qui, vraiment, sont contents que le gouvernement a fait ces changements-là parce qu'ils voient, franchement, que les vieux règlements étaient des règlements écrits dans le temps avant que ces machines-là aient même été mises sur le marché. Les règlements avaient besoin d'être améliorés pour être capable de refléter ce qui se passe aujourd'hui avec l'industrie mobilière à travers toute la province. So, donc, c'est une bonne nouvelle.

Again, I just want to say to my good friend Mr. Vanthof, the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, job well done. It is pretty clear—it was helpful to be able to bring this forward in getting the government to finally do something that’s right. Let’s hope that there are more things like this that can happen in the future.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It’s a pleasure to rise today to speak about this private Bill 58 from my good friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I do have to admit that I have to be somewhat polite to the member because my son lives in his riding. I’m not sure who he voted for, but he has high regard for the member. He’s been living in that part of the province, near Bala, for the last 10 or 12 years.

I come from eastern rural Ontario. What Bill 58 reflects on is vehicles a lot of my constituents have and use every day. We talk about the convenience of having these vehicles for whatever reason we want to have them, but somehow, sometimes—I know that we talked a little bit about the economic opportunities from allowing these vehicles, one from a recreational standpoint, similar to snowmobiles and other such vehicles—people use them for a holiday, for tourism—but also from sales or manufacturing. I think there is an economic spin-off. It’s something that we certainly need to consider in this House.

You know, sometimes we hear that private members’ bills don’t go anywhere. Well, Speaker, they might not make an immediate impact, but the fact that we debate them in this House and it gets attention from the public, it comes to a point where if something makes a lot of sense, it just elevates it within the government, and that’s with any government in power. I think we’ve seen a perfect example with this particular piece of legislation.

I just want to talk a little bit about where things are. There has been a lot of interest, as I mentioned a minute ago, in this topic as of late. I know that there are, as of right now, three private members’ bills tabled related to off-road vehicle use, two from the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, Bills 51 and 58, and one from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Bill 46.

Bill 46 was debated last week and it received all-party support. The member for Parry Sound spoke during debate on that particular bill.

Just some statistics on the off-road vehicle piece: In 2013, there were over 407,000 off-road vehicles registered in the province of Ontario. According to the Canadian Off-Highway Vehicle Distributors Council, over 11,000 of these were new ATVs that were sold in Ontario in 2013 alone. That refers to the economic benefit that these vehicles provide in our communities.

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Mr. Speaker, every year more and more people seem to be buying and using these types of vehicles right across the province, and the ORV industry continues to modernize and change. That is why it’s important that we balance this kind of modernization with road safety considerations.

We should be very proud that we have the safest roads in North America, and I think the people of Ontario need to make sure that we keep that in perspective. But we know that there’s always more that we can do to improve the safety of our roads.

As always, keeping our roads safe is the highest priority for our government. That is why our government has taken a number of concrete actions to keep both drivers and ORV riders safe. MTO staff continue to work closely with more than 150 road safety partners to develop and implement public education initiatives at the community, regional and provincial level. These partners include police agencies, injury-prevention practitioners, ORV clubs and trail organizations right across the province. MTO staff and these partners attend annual trade shows, make public presentations, develop and distribute public education material, create community displays, and deliver interactive programs to young riders in partnership with local secondary and elementary schools.

An important component of these initiatives is promoting youth rider safety. I think that’s where it starts. Regardless of the safety that we build into whatever vehicle, we always have to depend on education.

Ontario’s second annual ATV Safety Week will take place in May 2015. MTO has launched four ATV safety videos to assist the public in learning how to safely operate their ORV. An online knowledge-assessment tool has also been produced to allow riders to test their safety IQ.

Speaker, as we continue to debate this private member’s bill, I will certainly support the initiative to allow these vehicles, once we’ve hit all the points, to make sure that they’re safe—not only for these vehicles, but also the safety of others, which we sometimes tend to forget. Sometimes we think we know how to handle one of these vehicles, but it’s also people who are not in the vehicle who we have to be concerned about.

It has been a pleasure speaking to this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I’m pleased to join in the debate on Bill 58, introduced by my colleague the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka. This bill is being watched very closely in my riding of Leeds–Grenville and, I suggest, in rural ridings all over the province.

As we’ve heard, the bill would amend regulation 316/03 of the Highway Traffic Act to permit two-up ATVs and side-by-side utility task vehicles to be legally operated on roads where other ATV classes are allowed.

If you’re watching from home, no, this debate isn’t a repeat. I don’t want you to change the channel. We have debated the issue of fairness for ATV classes previously here at Queen’s Park. In fact, just last week, the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane had his bill passed. It was a very similar bill.

Applause.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yes. Give him a hand. He did very well. Good job.

Back in November 2013, the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, from the government side, had a motion on this issue pass, as well.

Speaker, I don't want to count my chickens before they're hatched, but I have a very strong feeling that this bill will get the same treatment by members today. That means we'll have passed a motion and two private members' bills on the matter. Yet when it comes to action by this government, the wheels in the Ministry of Transportation continue to spin. The minister is stuck in neutral while ATV and UTV owners are left wondering what on earth it takes to get action on a very straightforward issue to MPPs from all parties, who they support. Not once, not twice, but as of today, it will be three times.

I've heard from so many folks in my riding of Leeds–Grenville. I've written to two Ministers of Transportation. I've tabled petitions in support of this issue. Every time, essentially, the response is the same. It's "Be patient, Steve." But frankly, people in my riding are running out of patience on this very simple issue.

Last fall I got an excellent email from Dianne Beach, who lives near Elgin in beautiful Rideau Lakes township, a fabulous place to explore on your ATV. Dianne and her husband own two-up ATVs. She sent me a detailed 10-point email on why they deserve the same treatment as her friends who own ATVs permitted under regulation 316/03.

I don't have time to read all 10 points. I just want to highlight a couple. One of them, her number 4: "With these two-ups, we have to have a licence plate for the machine, insurance, road pass and my own driving licence."

The point that really hammered home the issue for me was number 7: "We have grandchildren, and they enjoy getting out in the wilderness. They see things otherwise they would never get a chance to—the hidden wonders of the outdoors. What happened to participation and teaching our children of life? We have taught our grandchildren if they see something of interest, we will stop." I think that's what the bill is all about: allowing more people to get out and explore what Ontario has to offer.

In the little time I have left, I just want to talk about two other points.

The first is what the amendment to regulation 316/03 doesn't do, and that is allow ATVs, two-ups and side-by-sides on municipal roads. There's been some confusion in my riding about that. I want to ensure everybody understands that road ATVs are allowed, and those decisions are with municipalities. They're going to continue to be with municipalities in consultation with their residents. The bill doesn't change local decision-making.

The second thing I've heard—and the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka mentioned it, and it was mentioned by a number of off-road motorcycle enthusiasts in my riding, like Dave Chartrand of North Augusta, Trevor and Stan Strickland, and Judy Kingston, who are all from Lombardy. It's the same thing. I know that the member behind me, Mr. Miller, mentioned this issue. The Ontario Federation of Trail Riders had mentioned this, and he

mentioned them in his remarks. I agree that we need to get this and the other concerns of the off-road vehicle owners in front of committee.

Again, I think we all agree on this. For everyone, we're waiting on action by the government. I truly, truly hope that the third time is the charm. We need to hear a commitment from the minister and their parliamentary assistant, but I'm glad that we're having this debate again in the House.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's truly an honour to stand up today and speak on behalf of the people of Timiskaming–Cochrane to Bill 58, the Utility Task and All-Terrain Vehicles Act, brought forward by the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I wholeheartedly support this bill, as I wholeheartedly supported the motion on November 7, 2013, from the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. Although this place tends to be very fractious at times, here's an issue, the issue of allowing side-by-sides to be governed under the same regulations as all-terrain vehicles, that is agreed on by, you would think, all three parties, because they've supported it a couple of times.

So what's the problem? Because it would seem that this is a fair—and actually, for the government to do this, they don't need to pass a law; it's a regulation change. Those of us in rural Ontario who depend on these vehicles for work, who use them with our families for leisure, for whom it's become a part of our being, are getting past the point of perplexed about why the government doesn't move on this.

But we've had a few clues. While we were speaking, the Chair of Cabinet mentioned a couple of times the environmental impact of these vehicles. Perhaps he would rather the people in northern Ontario walk to save what he believes is an impact. These vehicles are tested for their emissions. If they were governed more closely—that could also be governed more closely.

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The fact is, when you have kids or teenagers in my riding who take an ATV to work, as opposed to a 10- or 15-year-old car, I'm sure the ATV has fewer emissions. It's becoming plainly evident that a lot of people on the other side, on the government side, quite frankly, do not understand rural Ontario.

Last week, when I was debating basically the same bill, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change across the aisle said, "You don't understand, John. This isn't an urban-rural issue, because I have friends in Muskoka who use these." Yes, Muskoka is rural Ontario. And I don't want this to be an urban-rural issue, but it is, quite frankly, becoming one.

Mr. Chris Ballard: Because you keep making it one.

Mr. John Vanthof: We're making it one because this government isn't moving on an issue that's extremely important in places with no public transportation, places where sometimes the roads aren't even cleaned. When people look at other provinces and see that these things

are being used with no problem, that they're being used legally, some people come to me and say, "John, we already have some people who are using UTVs where they shouldn't be using them." And they should be charged, just like when someone is using an ATV in a spot where they shouldn't. If you want to be a cowboy with an ATV, you know what? You should face the brunt of the law.

But if you're a senior couple and you're using your UTV for the same purpose that you've used your ATV for the last 20 years, and now, because you can't straddle that ATV anymore, you trade your two ATVs for one UTV and do exactly the same thing—you get in your UTV from your home and drive to your camp, and you have to go on the side of Highway 560 for two kilometres—you've been doing it legally for the last 10 years, and now, because you have something with a steering wheel that, quite frankly, is safer, you're now an outlaw, according to this government. That is the problem.

We all agree. All the parties have supported this several times. This doesn't take a huge change. I'd like to congratulate the government for announcing that they're actually looking at a regulation change. I'd like to encourage everyone to go to the Ministry of Transportation website and tell the government how you feel, and hopefully, if we're loud enough and we make the argument enough times—and hopefully it's not like Groundhog Day that we're here again next year. I think my frustration is showing. But my frustration is the frustration of people who want to use these vehicles—side-by-sides and two-ups—who want to obey the law and are not allowed.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: How long does it take?

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, how long is this going to take? The member from Parry Sound–Muskoka was rightly talking about people in Quebec. My riding is right on the border of Quebec. Relatives on one side of the border can use their UTV within the law, and they respect the law. Basically, in Quebec you're allowed to use a UTV and respect the law; in Ontario, if you are a rural resident and want to use a UTV, basically the current law does not respect the people.

A law should evolve along with the common use of a tool. If UTVs were the weapon of choice for bank robbers, I could understand. But they're not. Another thing someone brought to his attention, and it's a valid point: What happens if this regulation is passed and all of a sudden UTVs get to look as big as Ford F-150 pickup trucks? Well, that means the law would have to evolve once more, and the law would have to make sure that these vehicles are used for what they're intended.

The argument is, "We can't change the law because who knows where this is going?" Those same people, 100 years ago, said, "We can't allow automobiles because of the horse; an automobile is much more dangerous than a horse." That's the same argument these people and this government are using. It's using environmental arguments.

It's time once and for all to respect the people of rural Ontario and allow them to use a vehicle in a law-abiding

way so they can have full enjoyment of their province as well.

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

Mr. Bob Delaney: Following on my good friend and colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane and my other long-time good friend who is sponsoring this bill, the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, I thought it would be only fair that the government ask an urban member to stand up and to say something about this.

First of all, for those of us who live in the cities, a lot of the terminology is unfamiliar to us. You hear about the ATVs and the UTVs and you wonder: Is that the same as the closed-circuit TV or the cable TV? In fact, the ATV refers to the all-terrain vehicle, which means it's something you ride with handlebars, very much like a bike, and the UTV is, as my friends have explained to me, "Think of the paradigm of golf cart."

My good friend from Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about: Are there unintended consequences if, to use his analogy, the UTV evolves to be the same size as a Ford F-150? Then we'll have to address it. I agree with him; I think that's a perfectly valid point.

Let me give you an example historically where just such a thing happened. In the 19th century in New Delhi, under the Brits, the British had a problem in that there were too many cobras in New Delhi, so they paid a bounty for every cobra skin that was turned over to them. As it happened, the unintended consequences were that a lot of local people began to breed cobras so that they could turn over the skin and make some money. There is a point to mention to my friend. What happened when the British caught on? All the people who had been breeding them just released them into the streets. But that's not what we're here to talk about, because the member has actually introduced a serious measure and I think it deserves a measured response.

In fairness to my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, I'm just going to quote from a document that he gave me a few minutes ago, and he said, "I didn't have time to actually mention this." He pointed out that the Ministry of Transportation is now actually asking for comments in writing and by email on exactly this issue. It's asking people: Would they send in submissions? So out there, if you have a feeling on this, you've got between now and the 13th of April of this year to send in your comments to the Ministry of Transportation. They're asking a number of questions. They ask, for example: What assessment criteria should the ministry use to determine what roads an off-road vehicle could travel on or along the shoulder of? They ask: Should existing on-road access be maintained? They ask a number of questions that I think are very serious ones. If you have a stake in this, I think you should download this questionnaire, have a look at it, and send it in.

It also shows something that my friend from Timiskaming–Cochrane was wondering. He said, "Is the government actually going to move?" This is showing—at the risk of being a prop—that the Ministry of Trans-

portation has in fact taken some ownership of the issue and said, “We think it’s time to have an intelligent, adult dialogue about doing something for utility terrain vehicles that we already do for all-terrain vehicles.”

As an urban member, I’m thinking to myself: If technically, up north, someone who uses a UTV, as both members have mentioned, to do what they have done for years with an ATV—and my friend from Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about: Would an elderly couple who had once had two all-terrain vehicles and who have traded them in for a UTV, something like the equivalent of a golf cart—would they be technically legal if they’re in two ATVs but illegal if they’re driving a UTV? If it sounds like it doesn’t make sense, then that’s why God created a Legislature and put adults here to make good law. That’s what I think we’re trying to do: make some good law in this circumstance.

1530

Now, I’m kind of interested in that because every year at end of November, in the Streetsville Santa Claus parade, I and my trusty cat, Obi-Wan, drive a golf cart right down Queen Street in Streetsville. Does that mean, on what would be classified as a UTV, that technically I might be in violation of the law? I really don’t know.

There are apparently, as of the last year for which figures are available, some 407,585 off-road vehicles registered in Ontario, and some 11,000 new ATVs were sold in Ontario in 2013 alone. So, very clearly, this is an issue that the province needs to take seriously, devote some thought to and come up with a workable framework of law to allow people who have a UTV which they intend to use for the purpose for which the vehicle was designed, where they don’t, for example, intend to use it in an urban park—and as my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka pointed out to me, many of these laws are in fact the children of the municipality, not the province. It means that what’s right in the north need not necessarily be right in an urban area, which I think is intelligent.

All in all, I think the member has brought forth a measure that definitely deserves discussion. I think we’re all going to vote for it in this House.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I’m pleased to stand and speak in support of Bill 58, brought forward by my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I know I speak for many in my riding when I say it’s clearly time that regulation 316/03 of the Highway Traffic Act be updated to include classes of all-terrain vehicles not currently defined under provincial legislation, including side-by-side and two-up models.

Bill 58 would amend the Highway Traffic Act to allow two-up-style ATVs as well as side-by-side style UTVs to be legally driven on designated roads and trails in a similar manner to the way that all-terrain vehicles are considered. These vehicles are currently being utilized in the province and have been available for individual purchase for over a decade. It’s time that the Ontario legislation is updated to include them.

It has been pointed out that despite a motion to this effect being passed by a government member in November 2013, there has been little action taken by the MTO on this regulatory change. That needs to change. This is something that makes sense in rural and northern Ontario, including in my riding of Nipissing.

I want to say that my friend Richard Woodward just sent me an email after he saw the motion pass last week from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. He wants to see us address what he calls low-pressure tires. When it snows in the north, we swap out those tires with tracks. So the act should also include the word “tracks,” specifically, to avoid any confusion. I want to say thanks to my friend Richard for passing that point on to us.

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters has sent a letter to the Minister of Transportation to this effect with respect to the bill, and is calling on the revision of the Highway Traffic Act to include the currently undefined classes of off-road vehicles. In ATV clubs and trail organizations, members are also reaching out with calls for action.

The gap in the legislation makes it difficult for ATV clubs and trails associations, as users who prefer this newer class of vehicle and may be less inclined to purchase permits as they’re not legally able to use the vehicles on public property. The limitations in the use of these off-road vehicles are not always made apparent when you go and purchase one of these vehicles.

In conclusion, let me say that other jurisdictions have embraced defining new classes of off-road vehicles. Quebec, for instance, allows them under similar regulation as traditional models and continues to benefit from tourism on public trail systems. Surely we can look at the Quebec example and make this work here in Ontario.

This is a good bill. We can do this in Ontario. It makes sense. I ask all my colleagues, especially those who backed the November 2013 motion and the motion last week from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane to vote in favour of Bill 58 today so we can move this forward.

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

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I was ready to move ahead.

Mr. Bill Walker: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I spent days on this.

I’d like to acknowledge my colleague Norm Miller, from Parry Sound–Muskoka, for bringing Bill 58 together to finish the work that sadly was never completed by this Liberal government.

It’s a pleasure to stand in support of updating regulation 316/03; namely, to include new classes of off-road vehicle that have four or more wheels, including side-by-side and two-up models. As I reminded the House just last week when I spoke in support of my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane’s private member’s bill, it was

back in 2013 that this House voted unanimously to do just that, and then they didn't: another broken promise. I hope the new Minister of Transportation supports outdoor enthusiasts more. Despite the fact that this is a billion-dollar industry that supports job creation and tourism, outdoor enthusiasts have not been treated very well by this government.

Most importantly, Bill 58 is about safety and accessibility. This amendment will improve people's safety on the road and allow people who have legally been riding an ATV to legally ride a UTV. Mr. Speaker, it doesn't seem that complicated. I can't understand why anybody on that side of the House is going to object to something that's going to give people the same right they enjoy today, but just on a different vehicle. In fact, it extends the ability of people, particularly as they get older or have mobility problems getting on an ATV, to ride in a UTV.

As debated last week, the side-by-side is popular among families because of its size, and it's especially popular among people with disabilities. I hope this minister will be mindful of his duty to protect all road users.

My riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound is home to ATV enthusiasts, anglers, hunters, farmers and cottagers, both residents and tourists. It's a recreation and leisure industry, and it's used for work purposes. I must say that there are a lot of people who come to our great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound from urban areas to enjoy the outdoor environment, and I think that's wonderful.

In Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, we have three such clubs: the South Bruce Peninsula ATV Club, the Dufferin Grey ATV Club and the Huron Shores ATV Club. Of course, the Dufferin Grey is also served by my colleague Sylvia Jones from Dufferin-Caledon—and my colleague Lisa Thompson from Huron-Bruce. We have the Haliburton ATV Association and the Kawartha ATV Association, represented wonderfully by my colleague Laurie Scott from Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. Of course, I have to mention Argo vehicles, which are produced in the riding of my good colleague Michael Harris from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the government and the Minister of Transportation to support my colleague's bill and help get this change made swiftly. We in this House have all agreed a couple of times already. All they have to do is change and have a willingness to move it forward. This province has thousands of kilometres of breathtaking trail networks. Let the people use them without fear of breaking the law.

Mr. Speaker, I need to also mention that this still requires enabling legislation by municipalities. If they want to use the argument about safety, the municipalities will still monitor and regulate that to ensure it is safe.

It is a critical thing. We have farmers who have to go from one piece of property to another, and they use these types of vehicles. There are people who drive from the city to a cottage and may need this to get to the trail system they have. It's all about providing access and providing enjoyment and the leisure of the outdoors.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: Sorry?

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: People with disabilities—absolutely mindful of those. That's one of the key things. I can't believe there would be any one of the 107 of us here who would vote against this and deny someone with a disability the ability to be in the great outdoors, to enjoy the great environment we have in the great province of Ontario.

I certainly hope that the minister will take this and heed. I hope every member across the aisle will see that this has been agreed upon unanimously by three parties before. In fact, one of their own members brought a very similar bill that they agreed to and did not bring that in. I hope that this time they'll acknowledge the great work of my colleague Norm Miller and help enthusiasts to be able to ride these legally in the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now call on the member for Parry Sound-Muskoka. You have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you to all the members who spoke to Bill 58: the members from Timmins-James Bay, Northumberland-Quinte West, Leeds-Grenville, Timiskaming-Cochrane, Mississauga-Streetsville, Nipissing and Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I did want to get on the record as well that I have received support from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, who represent thousands of people who like to get out into the bush in our rural areas.

1540

Greg Farrant wrote, "The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters is pleased to support Bill 58, Utility Task and All-Terrain Vehicles Act." He goes on to say, "The current regulations are badly outdated and not reflective of the increased numbers, use and popularity of ORVs including side-by-sides, two-ups and utility vehicles and the need to provide for the expanded use of these vehicles on roads." I'm glad to have that support, Mr. Speaker.

I note—I actually gave the member from Oakville the information for MTO, which is soliciting input from people interested in side-by-sides and UTVs. So, I would encourage people—I assume it's available on the MTO website—to give input and answer the various questions they have, in the hope that this will move the government forward.

As mentioned, there has been a motion from a Liberal member, the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane has a different way of approaching the same issue, and now I have this private member's bill. It would be nice to see the government actually move on it. I would suggest that before April 13, which is the end date for giving input, people go to the MTO website and make comments and let them know this is an important issue for people across Ontario. I thank members for their support today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take the vote at the end of regular business.

RAISE A GLASS
TO ONTARIO ACT, 2015
LOI DE 2015 POUR PORTER
UN TOAST À L'ONTARIO

Mr. Smith moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 67, An Act to amend the Liquor Control Act /
Projet de loi 67, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les alcools.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: It's an honour to rise today to speak to the Raise a Glass to Ontario Act.

When I was first a candidate, back in the 2011 election, I went into Prince Edward county and met with several winery owners there. They highlighted a couple of different things for me, Speaker.

First, they felt they didn't have access to the retail market that was necessary for the industry to grow. Second, they felt that regulations around the transportation of their product were ridiculously out of date.

Many of the people I met on that trip to the county have remained friends and valuable sources of information ever since, whether it was Caroline Granger, from the Grange of Prince Edward County; Lanny Huff, from Huff Estates; or Richard Karlo, from Karlo Estates.

I was thinking about this in my office just the other day: If I had to do one thing over again, I might change the name of this act. Many times in this House, Mr. Speaker, I've gotten to my feet and taken a poke at the government for introducing bills with great names that really don't do much. I wanted to introduce a bill with a great name that actually did something. If this bill gets to committee, Mr. Speaker, I think I might amend one thing, and that would be the name.

You see, my friend Richard Karlo lost his battle with cancer last year. Within two years of opening Karlo Estates, he made that winery profitable in Prince Edward county, something that is almost unheard of when we talk about the wine industry. My heart goes out to his wife, Sherry Martin, as well.

Rick's wines made it to the wine list at the Royal York hotel and the Toronto International Film Festival. He fought the LCBO's Cellared in Canada labelling, which would have given a marketing advantage to wines where up to 99% of the grapes harvested for a particular wine could be grown outside of Canada.

Last year, after we lost the election, I went into my office, and there was an email from Richard. He had watched the results come in. He told me to keep my chin up, and he said, "You should think about running for the party"—advice that was indicative of the incomparable King Richard I met in 2011, described in the National Post as the Indiana Jones of the Ontario wine industry.

I didn't take his advice, Mr. Speaker, and here we are today.

I know it is strange to lead off a discussion of your own bill by talking about one thing you might like to

change. But I think this bill should probably be called the Richard Karlo act.

That having been said, there is a lot packed into this bill that would help the beverage alcohol industry in this province grow and create more jobs. I think we all want that.

In 2014, the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario conducted a report to review the regulatory regime surrounding beverage alcohol in Ontario. In that report, the AGCO looked at a number of regulatory changes put forth by proponents seeking to make changes to the way our growing beverage alcohol industry does business.

Back when I used to call OHL games, there used to be a rule of thumb for an Ontario Hockey League franchise. One third of the franchises made money, one third broke even and the final third lost money. I sat down with the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association over the recess this winter and was told that the reality for Ontario Hockey League clubs isn't all that different for winegrowers either. The bigger operations seem to make some money—some of them actually make a lot of money—and the more medium-sized wineries with strong regional presence do a little better than breaking even, but for many vintners in Ontario their winery is quite literally a labour of love.

I hear from those people all the time that they do it because they love it, not because they're getting rich. Their profits are their vintages at the end of the day. Many of them labour for years to produce a great pinot noir or an award-winning chardonnay. The question has to be: How can we make it possible for some of these great Ontario products to end up in the hands of Ontario customers, either at special events or at restaurants across the province?

One way is to loosen some of the transportation regulations regarding the delivery of alcohol. As the AGCO report itself states, "It was therefore suggested that the relevant regulation should be amended to permit liquor delivery services to offer their services to business customers." Presently, if the Grange of Prince Edward, which is a great winery, is making a delivery of product on a truck that is half-full, it can't pick up products from other wineries or pick up products from the craft distillery in Prince Edward county and drop it off at the same point, which seems ludicrous to me. The two companies must contract the vehicle of a third-party company to do this.

Wineries in particular in the county are used to working together because they have the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association. If one were to deliver to a restaurant in Belleville, Kingston or Ottawa, delivering alongside other wineries or the County Cider Co., which has the great Waupoos Cider, they are right now forbidden by regulation if those products are on the same vehicle. It just doesn't make any sense.

As the AGCO also states, the existing regulation with direct delivery to licensees already causes problems and a decrease in business for the producers. When I go to a

restaurant here in Toronto and I want to order wine, I usually have a choice between maybe one or two—maybe three—of the wineries from Prince Edward county. I might be able to order a Huff's; I might be able to order a Sandbanks or a Casa-Dea or maybe a Karlo. But we have so many other great wineries in Prince Edward county whose access to market is being inhibited by the current structure and the current set-up.

That brings me to the second major facet of the bill, which is cross-selling. To quote once again from the government's own AGCO report, proposals include "allowing breweries to sell the beer of other beer manufacturers at their on-site brewery retail stores," which they call "cross-selling." Recently in this province, we've had an ongoing discussion about the retail sale of beer. It has been a hot topic.

Right now, if you want to buy a beer in Ontario, you have three options. You can buy it at the Beer Store, the LCBO or on the site where it's brewed. That's it—the retail store at the on-brewery site. If you're a craft brewer in this province, that means that the only retail options outside of your brewery are controlled by either the government or your major competitors. No other product has this type of retail environment that is this constrained, and that's a shame.

We've seen a boom in craft beer growth in the United States, in states like New York and Oregon. The number of craft breweries there has taken off, and they're not just making great beer; they're creating jobs in those states. But here in Ontario, once again, the transportation and retailing regulations make it hard to grow a business. I can order almost any great Ontario craft beer here in Toronto or buy it at the LCBO, but back home at Earl and Angelo's steakhouse in downtown Belleville or at the Waring House in Picton, you'd be lucky to find options much beyond a Steam Whistle or a Mill Street if you're looking for a craft beer—not that there's anything wrong with those products; they're great, but there are so many others out there that we should be opening the market up to.

Last summer I was having a barbecue with some friends and I wanted to stock up on some Twice as Mad Tom, which is a great craft beer from Muskoka. You can find it here in Toronto. Within a half-hour drive of my house, in the Stirling area, there are eight LCBOs and there are four Beer Stores. Do you think I could find Twice as Mad Tom at any of those stores? No, I couldn't.

1550

Under this bill, Barley Days Brewery, which is in my riding in the Picton area, would be able, as a member of the Ontario craft beer association, to stock Muskoka products at their onsite brewery store. Effectively, this would turn these stores from showrooms for a single label into small, private craft beer stores across the province. It would allow wineries and distilleries to do the same thing, if they so choose. The AGCO report noted that small brewers in particular would welcome this opportunity.

The final piece is the introduction of a warehousing system outside of the current LCBO system. If we're

going to loosen the direct delivery regulations to allow businesses to expand, we have to be serious about it.

If you're a brewer in Kitchener or a winery on the south coast, say, in Norfolk or Essex counties, but you've got a licensee in Ottawa or Sudbury interested in your product, same-day service is pretty much logistically impossible.

However, if you or the manufacturers' association to which you belong have licensed and bonded warehouse spaces available, you have the ability to not only expand but grow province-wide as a brand if you can meet the demand. That's the kind of market we should be establishing for Ontario-grown products.

There's a winery in Prince Edward county called Casa-Dea Estates. My friend Paul Marconi runs that winery.

Mr. Steve Clark: Yay.

Mr. Todd Smith: You know Paul; he's a good guy.

It's near Wellington. Thanks to changes in legislation last year—the government made some changes—Paul is now able to showcase his wares at the farmers' market at the ByWard in Ottawa on weekends.

But here's the ridiculousness of the rest of that story, Mr. Speaker. If he wants to stick around after the Saturday sale and sell again on Sunday, he has to pack up his bottles of wine, and he has to drive all the way back to his winery in Wellington and then drive back to Ottawa the next morning to sell again. If he tried to store his wine overnight in his truck or in his van, he'd be violating the Liquor Control Act. That's how out of date our alcohol regulations are in the province of Ontario.

I hope the members of the House will support this bill, help me modernize regulations that are holding back some great Ontario businesses, and open up consumer choice for Ontarians. There's so much opportunity here, Mr. Speaker.

The craft brewers are behind this. They want this. They want to be able to cross-sell their products. The Prince Edward county wineries and those in Niagara, the wine growers' association of Ontario—they're behind it. The Wine Council of Ontario is behind this. The wine council would love to see this happen.

In Prince Edward county, when you travel over the Norris Whitney Bridge from Belleville into the county—as I say, there are 40 different wineries there. Tourists are coming from Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. They're coming from the Quinte region to go into Prince Edward county. There are 40 wineries. They might only have time in the day to hit three, four or five of those wineries, but they might like the opportunity to sample products from other wineries that they're unable to get to because their vacation just isn't that long.

This would give them the opportunity to have Prince Edward county boutique wineries, where they could sell products from their competitors. They could bring in products from Niagara. They could bring in products from Norfolk and from Essex—down in Pelee Island.

It's time to make some changes; they're long overdue. Free our suds and raise a glass to Ontario.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to say at the outset that I'll be voting against this bill, but I want to congratulate the member on one point: He's trying to bring forward an issue that he believes in, and that's what PMBs are all about. Sometimes we're going to agree; sometimes we're going to disagree. On this particular one, I think we're going to part company and disagree.

I just want to very quickly go through what I think is part of the problem here. Should we be finding ways for craft brewers, vintners and spirit-makers to find other ways to be able to increase their sales and have a better opportunity to sell? Absolutely. I think there are things that we've done, and I think there are things that can be done, in order to make that happen.

But I do believe that the LCBO is the premier flagship, I would say, almost worldwide of the places that I've seen where we have the sale of alcohol. Where you have the LCBO, which is the only agency that sells all those spirits, wines and beers in a government store, we're able to make sure that we have a great selection. We're able to make sure that it is safe. We're able to make sure that we're not selling to minors, and that if we're going to be in a position where we sell alcohol to our citizens, we do it in a responsible way.

I worry about a system where we're going to introduce a concept of having more people sell alcohol, beer and spirits in private stores across Ontario as one of the issues—

Mr. Todd Smith: We're not.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, as I said at the beginning of my speech, I respect that the member has brought this forward. I do believe he truly believes in what he's doing as being the right thing. I commend you for that. I think it's important that you bring this here for debate, but this is part of the debate.

I think there is a problem, however, in introducing that concept of having more outlets to sell spirits, wines and beers by private operators across Ontario. It increases the risk for other people who are under-age to purchase alcohol. I think there will be some responsible ones. I think most people are responsible and want to do the right thing. I'm sure there would be some who would be, but, quite frankly, I think it's a bit problematic.

The larger issue is, why would we try to break up essentially what is a good system that we have currently today with the LCBO? They're very well organized. They have a huge selection when it comes to product. It's not as if we're without the ability to find a store somewhere in Ontario to buy those products we want to buy. But at the same time, it is an opportunity for the province to generate much-needed revenue that we don't have to take by way of additional taxation. If we decided that we wanted to diminish their market share by going in this direction, and that's ultimately what would happen, it really means to say we're undercutting ourselves as a province, or we'd have to increase the taxes on the products that are sold privately in order to make up the

difference, which would mean that consumers potentially could end up paying more.

For a number of reasons, I just want to say up front that I will be voting against this, and I assume the members of our caucus will do the same for reasons that are going to be put on the record a little bit later by my good friend the member from Toronto–Danforth, Mr. Tabuns, who will speak to this as well.

I also just want to say that I think the one thing the LCBO has done well over the last while is that they've been really good at allowing new products to go into their stores and to get shelf space in order to sell. I'll just give you one as an example. There is a Monsieur Rheault who lives in Hearst. He is the owner of a company that makes Loon Vodka.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The member puts up his thumb and says, "Fantastic." This individual entrepreneur in Hearst, Ontario, decided that he wanted to get into the business of making vodka. He went out and learned how to make what is called milk vodka. It's a very special vodka that not a lot of people know how to make; it's a bit of a secret recipe. This guy learned to do it from the masters, by observing, by studying, by doing things. And guess what? He is now producing the number one worldwide, Loon Vodka. His Loon Vodka is known to be the best in the world.

I encourage anybody who walks into a liquor store in Ontario, because I saw it at my corner store—I call it my corner store, the LCBO store down at the Atrium on Bay. We all know the one by the subway station. Loon Vodka is prominently displayed at that particular store. It's right next to the—what's the other big one?

Interjection: Grey Goose.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The Grey Goose Vodka. But I ask people to really try this Loon Vodka. It is an amazing vodka, very smooth, especially good when it's freezing cold in the freezer.

But my point is this: He met with the LCBO, he proved his product with the LCBO, and the LCBO now has it on the shelves across the province of Ontario. In Aurora, in Timmins, in Kapuskasing and Welland, people have seen it. So my point is, he has a larger market share by selling through the LCBO to be able to sustain his business. Imagine if he couldn't get that market share through the LCBO and had to set up his own store somewhere. He would have a very limited market to sell his Loon Vodka. So let's also understand that the LCBO, if properly run, provides producers a better opportunity to sell their products.

If we can do things better in the LCBO, let's hear what those are and let's see what we could do in order to make the LCBO an even greater success than it is today.

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you for this time in the debate.

1600

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

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'll be sharing my time with the Chair of the Cabinet later on.

I want to congratulate the member for Prince Edward–Hastings for bringing forward a very good bill; I think it is. I'm going to be looking forward to the debate and eventually seeing this bill go through committee for further review. But I think the fundamental principles of what the member for Prince Edward–Hastings is trying to achieve are things that I certainly support, and I think many people on this side of the House would support.

The notion that this is to simply create a parallel retail distribution network, as the member for Timmins–James Bay said, misses the point. I think what the member for Prince Edward–Hastings is trying to get to is that this is about creating not just new outlets for the sale of beer, wine and spirits for producers, but it's about creating those experiences that visitors—whether they're Ontario visitors to another region of Ontario or tourists from outside of Ontario—seek to have by sampling different wines, sampling different beers and different brew products. So I think this notion about being able to introduce more ability to cross-pollinate the craft brewer industry, the winery industry, is an excellent notion. I think that's certainly very consistent with some of the review that the government has been undertaking through the council on review of government assets, which is not just looking at how to realize more revenue for the government, but to modernize how we do things.

Certainly, in terms of Etobicoke–Lakeshore—unfortunately, I don't have any wineries in my riding, but I have three fabulous craft brewers: Great Lakes Brewery, Cool Beer and Black Oak. Over the last few weeks during the break, I took it upon myself to visit these three establishments, talk to them, see their operations and ask them how they think the current system is working. I may have also sampled some of their products along the way.

What's clear from that is their ability to work together in a community would be enhanced and that would create a better experience for consumers as well as for the manufacturers. I don't think it would take away from the ability of a well-managed, government-run institution like the LCBO to continue to thrive. I think what it would actually do is it would create more economic activity. I think it would create more jobs, more sales and more tax revenues. Tax revenues flow to the government and benefit the residents of Ontario ultimately. I think from that perspective, this is something that we should be looking at.

As I mentioned, the review that Mr. Clark is doing for us through the council on government assets is looking at how we could improve the sale of beer in this province, looking at ways that we could maximize the revenues from the sale of beer, alcohol and spirits. That kind of work: looking at some simple things like whether you sell six-packs or 12-packs or even two-fours in liquor stores or maybe allow some other retail outlets to sell brewed products. These are the kinds of innovative ideas this government is looking at. When a member of the official opposition comes up with good ideas, I applaud him. I will be supporting this at this stage and I would urge my colleagues to do so as well.

We talk a great deal in this House about wanting to create a better economic climate in this province, and I can think of no better way than taking steps that encourage the entrepreneurs, those who create the vast majority of jobs in this province, to make their lives a little bit easier and at the same time make this province a little bit more fun to live in and more fun to visit. I think these types of measures would assist that.

Certainly when we do that, then we will see the economic growth. We will see the growth in tax revenues. We will see that support for this government's ability to pay for our 10-year, \$130-billion infrastructure plan, for the \$29 billion that we want to invest in public transit, roads, bridges and transportation infrastructure throughout the province so that those very entrepreneurs who have product to move in this province will be able to move it more effectively and so that the tourists who want to go and visit these wonderful establishments throughout the province will be able to get to them more easily and more safely.

I say to the member for Prince Edward–Hastings, I raise a glass to your bill, and I look forward to the rest of the debate. Cheers.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm happy to rise and speak on this bill to support my colleague here. It will only be for a few minutes. There's quite a few of our members who do want to say a few words on this great bill that has been brought forward by the member Todd Smith.

I've been dealing with one of the craft brewers in my riding, Railway City brewery, which often wins one of the best beer awards at the annual event held here for craft beer at the Legislature with their Dead Elephant Ale. This bill actually addresses quite a few of the concerns that they've been asking about for a number of years. Being able to cross-sell their brew with other breweries throughout the province, in addition to being able to transport their beer throughout the province and sharing the load with other breweries, will not only decrease their costs but also enhance their ability to grow and, at the end of the day, create more jobs. I think that's really what Ontario needs now. Craft brewers of this province are one of the leading job creators in the marketplace, and they only continue to grow as craft brewers grow.

Speaker, I have Railway City brewery in my riding, which I truly do support. I just have to make mention of two brews that they do special limited editions of that I really enjoy. The Witty Traveller they come out with during the summertime—you can only get it in the summer. It's a great way to cool your thirst during the summer. Also, during Christmastime, the Cranberry Festive Lager is made with their southern rail line beer, and throw a little cranberry in it. It's probably one of the best-tasting Christmas beers I've ever had. In fact, I still have a bunch left in my fridge that I hope to enjoy later on this year.

But I do have to mention that we do have a couple of wineries in my riding that I'm quite proud of: The

Carolinian winery, which is out in Thorndale, they just purchased Rush Creek winery near Aylmer, and they do fruit wines, which is really good. Of course, we have Quai du Vin. It's a long-time winery just outside St. Thomas on Fruitridge Line. Jamie Quai is now running it. I think this will be an added benefit to them, especially with the transportation of their product to other areas throughout the province. When you can decrease the costs that these wineries and breweries have in their business, they're going to expand, they're going to grow, and it's going to be a plus for Ontario. It's not going to affect the LCBO at all. I don't know what the NDP is talking about. However, what it's going to do is grow business in this province, and that's what we need to focus on.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise to discuss this bill today, An Act to amend the Liquor Control Act. My colleague from Timmins–James Bay credited Mr. Smith for bringing this bill in. I think he is credibly, reliably, representing the perspective of his party. Having talked with him before, I have no doubt that he honestly sees this as a way to move forward the sale of liquor, wine and beer. I actually disagree with him, but I also think that he's being authentic and honest in what he's doing.

I note, having talked to some of my colleagues from the Niagara region, that the Winery and Grower Alliance of Ontario hasn't been consulted on this. We checked with them today—

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, they tell us they haven't been consulted, and this is a matter that would not be in their top 10 list of things to be done. The Niagara grape growers are opposed and also said they had not been consulted. The Wine Council of Ontario has said today that they weren't consulted and didn't know about the bill. So I'm a bit surprised that that sort of groundwork hadn't been done.

Speaker, at the heart of it, this is a bill about privatization of liquor, wine and beer sales in Ontario. That's what this bill does. It's not sort of at the core of it. It's not sort of hidden anywhere. It's really straightforward. If you manufacture spirits, if you ferment wine, if you ferment beer, you're going to be able to sell products and sell products that everyone else produces, as well. This is a privatization initiative. I'm surprised to see that the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore is in support of this bill, because my understanding has been that the Liberals have understood, to some extent, the importance of keeping the LCBO in public hands, the importance of that revenue for our health care services, for education.

1610

The reality, Speaker, is that people in this province don't want privatization. They don't want privatization of the LCBO. They don't want privatization of their electricity systems. We went through this debate about five years ago when Dwight Duncan and Dalton McGuinty

hired Goldman Sachs—those wonderful financiers, those geniuses behind the Greek economic miracle—to ask them how to privatize OLG, LCBO, OPG. In the end, Dalton McGuinty and Dwight Duncan, in a majority government situation, realized that, politically, it was a total loser, and they dumped it.

In this province, we hear constantly about the need for funding for education, about the shortfalls in funding for education. We had nurses filling this chamber this morning, desperate for recognition of their wages, desperate for investment in health care, desperate for equity between those who work in hospitals and those who work in communities. Where will that money come from?

This is a government that has been cutting corporate taxes for a decade. This is a government that has been saying, “We need all these services, but we don't have the money to provide them.” Why on earth would this government vote for a bill that would undermine the very sources of revenue that we need to provide the services to a modern society that has a chance of competing in this global economy?

Mr. Speaker, look at some of our experiences with privatization in this province. The Conservatives started the privatization of the electricity system. At the end of the 1990s, that program rolled out under their jurisdiction till about 2003, and then that program was carried forward on a piecemeal basis by the Liberals. What has come with it? Soaring prices for electricity. An undermining of our economy. Hardship for families who are trying to keep the lights on and keep themselves warm, and in the summer, obviously, keep themselves cool. People finding that their household budgets are stretched to the limit. Why? Because this government decided that privatization was a good thing. They didn't do it overtly the way the Tories did. They did it silently, a piece at a time. But in the end, the effect is the same: a huge rise in prices, a reduction in the standard of living. This bill continues that kind of thinking.

The Auditor General's most recent report noted that this government, through its commitment to public-private partnerships—the privatization of public infrastructure—had wasted \$8 billion. Eight billion dollars is a lot of money. You can build a lot of hospitals. You can repair a lot of schools. You can hire a lot of child care workers. You can put people in place to help children with special education. When you privatize public services, when you privatize public agencies that make money that we use for services, then ultimately those services are cut.

Speaker, this bill represents an honest expression of Conservative ideology. Fair enough. I don't think that's an approach that's actually going to allow this province to grow. It's an approach that will undermine our services. Frankly, it's an approach that the Liberals, who speak for services, should be opposing.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: First of all, I want to address the last remarks about privatization. I'm looking at the April 1, 1995, Kitchener-Waterloo Record, where it says,

“The Ontario government is asking the private sector to help build and pay for two more sections of the new toll highway north of Toronto.” That’s the 407. The Financial Post, June 24, says, “Not even the Ontario NDP government could resist the logic of contracting out: The new Highway 407 to the north of Toronto is being built and will be operated by a private consortium under government contract.”

My friend from Timmins–James Bay was there. I thought the NDP was always opposed to privatization. That has nothing to do with this bill, but I did hear the member for Toronto–Danforth, one of my favourite NDP members—

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, I respect the dean of the Legislature. However, I would ask you to listen to what his speech is about and have him speak on this private member’s bill. This is a very important private member’s bill by my member, and I think we need to stick to that topic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I thank you for your point of order, but the previous speaker did start out with privatization. I think he was making that reference, so I will allow him.

Proceed.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Privatization is included in the discussion of this bill.

The government of the day, back in 1995, “also announced today that the province will seek private-sector partners to accelerate planning and design of Highway 407.”

“The 407 East is an ideal opportunity to have a new look at what it takes for the private sector to finance a highway.”

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister, I hope you will tie it into the bill quickly.

Hon. James J. Bradley: This is the NDP, who are always saying that others want to privatize. I digress only because the member mentioned that, first of all. That was the road to privatization.

Back to the bill—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know it’s annoying, the member for Hamilton Mountain, but I did do research that shows who started the privatization. I know; I would be embarrassed as well, but that happens.

Back to this bill. We appreciate what the member for Timmins–James Bay had to say about the fact that you’ve raised an issue, at the very least. That’s good, when these issues are raised and discussed. I happen to think that the LCBO as it exists today has improved vastly over the years. The days when you had to, they tell me, fill out a form and come out with a bottle wrapped up in a brown paper—that’s gone. Now there are—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I hear the member for Brockville disparaging the name of Gerry Loughheed, who, by the way, has raised more money for charity—

Interjection.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Watch for leadership candidates in your party—than most people in the Sudbury area have ever seen. But that has nothing to do with the bill either.

I do want to say that the bill allows us to discuss some of these issues. If you were to check with the Grape Growers of Ontario, you would find that they would have appreciated a widespread consultation on this particular bill before it was brought forward, because they have some concerns about the contents of this bill.

I have some concerns about it. Monsieur Bisson mentioned that the LCBO has improved its footprint, its store, its ability to take on new product over the years, and there’s still more to be done in that case. Nobody has mentioned the Beer Store yet because they’re all afraid to mention the Beer Store, I think. No one has mentioned that.

There’s a discussion going on now. Mr. Ed Clark is doing an evaluation of government assets and is going to be making some recommendations. The member is contributing to that general debate, and I want to give him credit for contributing to that general debate.

One of the things we’d be concerned about is if, in the provisions of this bill, foreign product would be available at the sites he’s talking about. It mentions that a manufacturer of beer or cider, spirits or wine may sell, in stores it owns and operates, its own spirits and wine as well as that of other manufacturers of the same type of liquor. That makes me say: Does that mean wine from France? Does that mean wine from South Africa? Does that mean wine from Chile? How does that advance the case for us?

1620

I’m a person who encourages private members to bring these forward. I hate seeing private members’ bills defeated in the House, because they should be allowed, for the most part, unless they’re very egregious, to move forward to committee, where there’s some more detailed analysis.

You’ve heard my speeches recently on the importance of committees and getting things to committee so that we can have those discussions, have people with some expertise making representations to the committee, having input, having members of the Legislature have the opportunity to put forward amendments that may strengthen or change a bill in such a way as to make it more acceptable to all.

Though I have many apprehensions about the provisions of this bill, I don’t want to discourage the member from ever bringing forward any further bills because the door was shut in his face today. I do encourage him very much to continue to bring forward bills for debate in this Legislature that will have a good topic before us for discussion.

I relate the fact that the Grape Growers of Ontario are very apprehensive about this bill, and I don’t blame them.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 67, which the member has named the Raise a Glass to Ontario Act. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings mentioned in his opening comments that it's all about jobs. I'm very pleased that in the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka we have four craft breweries now, the biggest being Muskoka Brewery, as well as Lake of Bays brewery, the Highlander brewery in South River, and Sawdust City in Gravenhurst. They make some great beers.

I think about the jobs part of his talk. When I toured Muskoka Brewery for the first time, I think they had about 65 employees at that point. They said, "We're not efficient. We hire a lot of people." At that point, they were in an old co-op building in downtown Bracebridge which was a good retail outlet as well, but because they grew so much—they've doubled and doubled their output—they actually moved into the old Alcan plant in Bracebridge, which was a much more efficient operation for producing the beer.

The crazy part about the rules in Ontario is that they had to give up their retail outlet in downtown Bracebridge—a much better place for people actually looking to buy beer because the rules say that you can only sell the brew where you make it. The Alcan plant is kind of out in the country and not really a place that people would necessarily be driving by unless they went looking for it. This just doesn't make sense at all. You'd think they should be able to have both locations.

This bill goes to freeing up some of these crazy rules that we have to make it a little more convenient for people and enable some of our businesses to grow and create more jobs. I certainly think that's a positive thing.

I've had the pleasure of spending a little bit of time as a tourist in Prince Edward county. I went there one year around Victoria Day weekend, kayaking and cycling, and had the pleasure of seeing how the vineyards have developed there. I can see why he has brought this bill forward, because it seemed like 15 years ago there were no vineyards and now they're everywhere around Prince Edward county. It was a great experience having the opportunity to go kayaking in the morning and then cycling from vineyard to vineyard in the afternoon. But as he pointed out, you don't get too far on a bicycle, so it would be nice to be able to buy more than one brand of wine produced, which his bill would allow.

I'm very pleased that he has brought this bill forward and I look forward to supporting it. I think it is time to look at the rules that we have in the province of Ontario from the perspective of the producers and also from the perspective of the consumer as well.

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

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to rise and speak in support of my PC colleague's private member's bill. This bill will help modernize Ontario's alcohol beverage sector. My PC colleague is reintroducing this great private member's bill, after it previously died on the order paper in the spring. This bill will absolutely help

clear up some red tape that stands in the way of Ontario wineries, craft brewers, distilleries and cideries, to allow them more options to distribute and sell their products.

Dufferin–Caledon is home to Chesslawn Vineyard and Winery, Downey's Estate Winery and Adamo Estate Winery.

Ontario cider is also well represented in my riding: Spirit Tree Estate Cidery and Southern Cliff Brands, which produces Pommies cider, call Dufferin–Caledon home. Both cideries competed in the ninth annual Great Lakes International Cider and Perry Competition, in which Southern Cliff Brands brought home a bronze and a silver medal in the New World cider category. In addition, Spirit Tree Estate Cidery brought home a silver medal in the specialty cider and perry category.

Speaker, I applaud my colleague from Prince Edward–Hastings for bringing forward this bill that will help our Ontario wineries, brewers, distilleries and cideries. Instead of holding back our local producers, who, in most cases, are using 100% Ontario-grown fruit in their products, we should actually be trying to help them and encourage that support.

I support my colleague's private member's bill and hope to see it passed without further delay.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm happy to speak on behalf of my colleague's Bill 67, the Raise a Glass to Ontario Act.

I recently spoke to Still Waters Distillery, which is in Concord, maybe a five- or 10-minute drive from my constituency office in the riding of Thornhill, and it seems like an interesting place. They invited me to come for a tour, and I'm looking forward to that. The owners are two gentlemen named Barry: Barry Bernstein and Barry Stein. I don't know how they keep that straight, but I'll do my best to keep it straight.

I spoke to one of the Barrys, and he made some comments to me, but first I want to just let you know a little bit about them. You can visit their website at stillwatersdistillery.com. They have a small operation, just a few employees, but they would love to grow. In 2013, they won a Canadian Whisky Award of Excellence. They do their best to buy locally grown grain, within a hundred-kilometre radius, and they certainly always buy Canadian grain. They're in Concord, Ontario, which is such a nice little community. They have a range of handmade spirits.

One of the Barrys told me that their biggest issue is that spirits are treated differently than beer and wine. I think we have to look at the fact that so many people are crossing the border. Most Canadians live within the border and they cross over the border. So often, when we're travelling, we see people buying alcohol at Duty Free, and what a shame that is when we have so many locally produced beers, wines and spirits. Basically, taxation is extremely high for spirits—it's a smaller taxation for beer and wine—and I think that really limits the growth of these products.

I think we shouldn't kid ourselves. The Pan Am Games, we all know, are going to bring a lot of parties

and partying—hopefully, safe partying—to the GTA and surrounding municipalities. Wouldn't it be nice if we could showcase some of our craft breweries, micro-breweries and craft distilleries while all those tourists and visitors were coming here? I think it's a shame if we can't.

I think the LCBO does the best job that it can within its mandate, but I think that we could do so much better and do so much more. We don't have to all be cookie cutters in every industry. We can be a little more creative. We're Canadians, and we deserve that.

Right now, the Canadian spirit industry is almost completely foreign-owned, and I would certainly like to see that changed. We should be encouraging our own business owners to sell directly, to increase their profits and to increase their number of employees. We were talking earlier today about pension plans, and we all know that the best way to save for retirement is to have a great job. We're really limiting this fantastic industry. We need to really focus on what we can do to expand this market rather than shutting it down.

1630

I think that we should have all-party support for this bill. I think we should let businesses move forward with less red tape, less restrictions. I think some of the restrictions—maybe they had a good reason for putting them in. I certainly can't imagine why different distilleries can't share shipping costs and share trucks. We hear often from the Minister of the Environment about being more environmentally conscious. Making them take their product home, drive it home, and then drive it back again the next day for the rest of a fair or a show is certainly not in the best interests of our roads, our environment and our gridlock.

I think that we should all raise a glass in memory of your friend, who you were thinking of renaming the bill after. As we say in Thornhill, L'Chayim. Drink and drive responsibly. We'll end on that note.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Prince Edward–Hastings, you now have two minutes.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'd like to thank all of those who chimed in on the debate here this afternoon: my colleagues from Thornhill and Dufferin–Caledon as well as Elgin–Middlesex–London and Parry Sound–Muskoka, and the members from the government side.

The member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore was very supportive of the bill. The meandering ways of our minister from St. Catharines—sometimes it's hard to find exactly what his message is, but I appreciate him speaking on the bill this afternoon as well.

To the members of the third party from Toronto–Danforth and Timmins–James Bay: I just want to clarify a couple of things for the members of the third party. There was some concern about the fact that this was going to somehow create new outlets for alcohol sale. That's not the case at all. What this bill would do is allow the cross-selling of products in other retail stores that

already exist on-site, so there would be no new points of sale across the province. We would essentially be creating 40 mini craft beer stores across the province. There would be no new retail outlets created as a result of this bill.

And I did consult. As I mentioned earlier, I've been working on this bill for three years now, Mr. Speaker. I'm really happy I was able to debate it here this afternoon. We have had extensive consultation on this bill for the last three years with the Grape Growers of Ontario, the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association, the WGAO, the Wine Council of Ontario, the craft brewers, the Beer Store, the national brewers and Spirits Canada. Not all of those organizations or associations were supportive of this bill. But this is something that is needed for the medium-sized and smaller brewers, distillers, wineries and cideries in Ontario. They need more access to market.

It has been overwhelming that the public wants this as well. They want to see an expanded retail sector for our alcohol distribution. While this doesn't create any new points of sale, this does have the potential to create hundreds more jobs, if not thousands of jobs, in this sector.

I appreciate everybody's contribution to the debate here this afternoon, and I hope that you'll support me and raise a glass to Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
AMENDMENT ACT (VOTING HOURS
EXTENSION), 2015

LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES ÉLECTIONS MUNICIPALES
(PROLONGATION DES HEURES
DE SCRUTIN)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 28, standing in the name of Mr. Berardinetti.

Mr. Berardinetti has moved second reading of Bill 68, An Act to amend the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 to keep voting places open until 9 p.m.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to send the bill to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills. Agreed? So moved.

UTILITY TASK AND ALL-TERRAIN
VEHICLES ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LES AUTOQUADS
ET LES VÉHICULES POLYVALENTS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Miller has moved second reading of Bill 58, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to utility task and all-terrain vehicles.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—

Mr. Norm Miller: The Legislative Assembly committee, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to the Legislative Assembly committee. Agreed? So moved.

RAISE A GLASS
TO ONTARIO ACT, 2015
LOI DE 2015 POUR PORTER
UN TOAST À L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Smith has moved second reading of Bill 67, An Act to amend the Liquor Control Act.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a whole lot of noes.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute vote.

The division bells rang from 1635 to 1640.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Members take their seats, please.

Mr. Smith has moved second reading of Bill 67, An Act to amend the Liquor Control Act. All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Clark, Steve	Martow, Gila	Scott, Laurie
Damerla, Dipika	McMahon, Eleanor	Sergio, Mario
Dickson, Joe	Milczyn, Peter Z.	Smith, Todd
Fedeli, Victor	Miller, Norm	Thompson, Lisa M.
Jaczek, Helena	Munro, Julia	Walker, Bill
Jones, Sylvia	Naidoo-Harris, Indira	Wong, Soo
Malhi, Harinder	Potts, Arthur	Yurek, Jeff
Mangat, Amrit	Qaadri, Shafiq	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Forster, Cindy	Taylor, Monique
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	French, Jennifer K.	Vanthof, John
Bisson, Gilles	Singh, Jagmeet	
Fife, Catherine	Tabuns, Peter	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 23; the nays are 10.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—

Mr. Todd Smith: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, SCOFEA.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Agreed? Agreed.

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 February 25, 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 Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm honoured today, as I am every day that I have the opportunity to stand in this fine chamber and speak on behalf of my constituents in my riding of Oshawa.

Today it is my distinct pleasure to rise to discuss Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other acts. It is also referred to as the Agriculture Insurance Act.

My remarks follow in the footsteps of the always illuminating member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who also serves as our party's critic for agriculture, food and rural affairs. In this role he delivered impassioned and poignant remarks on this bill prior to the Legislature break in December, and as a lifelong farmer, his remarks are insightful and immensely valuable.

As members of provincial Parliament, we have the opportunity to learn about and speak about such a vast array of topics and subjects, and consequently we often call on the expertise of others to form what we hope are balanced and well-reasoned positions. But on that day, it was especially exciting to watch my colleague the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane speak not just on an academic level but on a personal level about a topic

that he has not only learned, but lived. For that, I thank him and hope to echo some of his sentiments here today.

In that vein, I would like to begin by restating a brief passage of his speech that I feel encapsulates a concern that we, as members, hear far too often from our constituents. Speaker, what this legislation does is that “it changes words so that this could happen. It changes it from the Crop Insurance Act to the agricultural products act, I believe. That needs to happen in order to proceed, but that doesn’t guarantee that other products will actually be covered. It’s changing the wording. It’s an important step, but a very small step. It’s a step that could have been taken at any time in the last 11 years.

“It’s worthy to note that Ontario is the last province to actually move in this direction. We sometimes hear that Ontario is a leader” in climate change. “‘We’re a leader in climate change,’ the government says, ‘and we’re a leader in this.’ They’re certainly, absolutely not a leader in agriculture production insurance. They’re not a leader, they’re a laggard, and that’s important to note.”

And he goes on: “As much as we support this legislation.... [this] legislation in itself is not going to be that change. There is a lot of work and consultation to be done. This is a step—an important first step, but it is merely a step.”

And so, Mr. Speaker, our concern is not with the content of this bill. We support this bill and what it represents. Our concern is with the time it has taken the government to realize it. It should be noted that Ontario is the only province that does not allow production insurance for a broad range of agricultural products, so you can see why the agricultural industry has been calling for this change. It is another great example of how this government has managed to distinguish our province. Other such examples include having the highest tuition rates in Canada and the greatest net debt of any province in the country, so it is another area where the government needs to make necessary changes, and they need to happen now.

Agricultural insurance is one of the fundamental tools that we have to protect farmers and ensure food security for our province. It makes sense to ensure that all agricultural products are covered under this program, not just crops. So our concern is with the government’s motivations. As my colleague stated, this is a change that should have been put forward a decade ago, and there was no reason why it couldn’t have been put forward then. So while we appreciate that the change is being made, we are reminded of why so many believe that government is too slow or just generally behind the times. I guess the government must reap what it sows on this one.

I understand that there will always be outstanding changes that need to be made, but this bill represents a shining example of this concern and the reason for public disenchantment. For those who haven’t read the bill, it consists of a few pages of mostly the same statement: “... of the act is amended by striking out ‘agricultural crop or perennial plant’ and substituting ‘agricultural product’.”

Of course, the implications of this are significant and its impact will be far-reaching within the agricultural community. Farmers and agricultural experts have been calling for this change for years, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to join their voice in support.

It is also noted in this bill that the government will need to pass regulations once the bill passes. I hope, for the sake of the agricultural community, that those regulations are not going to take another decade to see the light of day. As I mentioned earlier, I’m not a farmer, but I’m pretty sure that if it took them 10 years to plant their field, it would have some pretty significant repercussions for their harvest.

There are also concerns about the government’s commitment to fund this bill. Ultimately, its implementation is going to cost money, yet no funding has been earmarked in the budget for this change.

Speaker, I will once again refer back to my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane for further background on the reasons for our concerns, and I again quote.

“The cost of production insurance is shared by three partners: farmers, the provincial government and the federal government. It’s shared 40% by farmers, 24% by the province and 36% by the feds, and there’s the issue, because there’s no money on the table. We waited 11 years for a word, but there’s no money on the table, and that’s really important, Speaker, because we know that there’s no money in a lot of places. In fact, a lot of places are losing money.

1650

“There is another program where farmers worked together with previous Ministers of Agriculture. It’s a risk management program. The production insurance that we’re talking about today covers the actual production: how many tonnes of crop you get from a field, how many bushels of potatoes.... Risk management covers the price you get. With risk management you can insure yourself to make sure that—because crop prices go up and down, so it can kind of even it out. Agricultural groups, with the provincial government, got together and they did a really good job. They created a risk management program bar none for the province of Ontario. It was bankable; it was predictable. That’s what agriculture needed. Then this government capped it.

“It was estimated that for this program to run efficiently and to make sure that the agricultural sector, the base production sector, which actually drives the agri-food industry in our province, which creates, I believe, \$30 billion or \$34 billion in economic activity and fuels 740,000 or 750,000 jobs—that’s all based on the primary producer being solid, bankable and predictable so he can go to his bank and say, ‘I need to borrow X so I can plant my crops.’

“That’s what we had with the risk management program. Then this government capped it, so it’s no longer bankable or predictable. Does it help? Yes. Are the commodity organizations going to chastise the government? No, because at the end of the day, it’s the government. But, in all reality, Speaker, for that risk management

program to work, the cap has to be raised close to what it was when the program was originally designed, which is between \$175 million and \$200 million.

“Why that’s important ... and why that has something to do with production insurance is because for the production insurance to be moved over, or for the umbrella to cover more commodities, the money is going to have to come from somewhere to pay the province’s portion. That hasn’t been identified.”

I should also note that the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is among the ministries facing annual cuts of 6% per year, every year, for the next three years. I hope the government is accounting for this anomaly as they draft the required regulations.

As we have stated before, this is an important change that experts and stakeholders have been demanding for years, so we want to make sure the government has dotted its i’s and crossed its t’s. It is our job as members on this side of the aisle to hold the government to account, and we don’t want anything left up to chance, just as the agricultural community is going to want some assurance when it comes to their insurance. That’s what this bill is about.

Insurance provides a level of stability. It provides guarantees and peace of mind. Currently, there are large portions of the agricultural sector that do not have the opportunity to be a part of this program. As a specific example, Mark Wales, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, told Better Farming, “We’ve been working on getting more crop insurance products for quite some time.” Livestock farmers “have been promised crop insurance for more than a decade, going back to the agricultural policy framework in the early 2000s.”

The fact is that farmers have needed these changes for a long time. Pork farmers should have had access to insurance against PED. Beef farmers should have had access to insurance against BSE. No, Speaker, I’m not going to attempt to pronounce the full names of those diseases, but what I will do is say that both of these diseases represent the same thing: instability. Just as any company insures their building in case of fire or theft, the agricultural industry should be able to insure its assets against outside risk factors.

This program currently protects producers from yield reductions and crop losses caused by factors beyond their control, including drought, disease, pests, frost and floods. Any of these can cause significant volatility to a farmer’s business. Regardless of the precaution they take, there is nothing that can guarantee protection from a pest or invasive species.

I had the opportunity to learn about invasive species recently. The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters is headquartered in Peterborough, not far from my riding, and I popped in and enjoyed the opportunity to meet with them over the winter break. I did my undergraduate degree, interestingly, in biology and was able to have conversations about fish, fish science, fishing and conservation, and we talked about invasive species. They primarily focus on the threat of invasive species to On-

tario’s lakes and wetlands, but potential for catastrophic damage is consistent with the concerns that the agricultural sector faces with a number of pests.

In partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters developed the Invading Species Awareness Program in response to the fact that “invading species can have devastating effects on native species, habitats and ecosystems.” This is the same devastation that harmful pests can have on crop yields, and it’s the reason why agricultural insurance is just as necessary as insurance is to any other industry and why it is important that this program is expanded to include livestock.

I’ll also take this opportunity to invite everyone, outdoor enthusiasts, to stop in and visit their new heritage and education centre. You can learn all about invasive species and more.

There are actually a lot of similarities between this and some of the other issues I’ve been speaking about in my role as the NDP pension critic. This is also about ensuring stability for Ontarians and for Ontario’s economy. Leaving people in the lurch prevents them from effectively planning for their future and limits their ability to act as freely as they otherwise would, whether that be investing in their farming business or contributing to their local economy with a greater discretionary income. It benefits all of us when an entire sector, especially one as significant as the agricultural sector, is more effectively able to plan and grow.

As I stated in a speech to the Legislature just last week: “We don’t want our communities to suffer. As Ontarians, I don’t believe we want our neighbours to struggle. We don’t want our businesses to go under. We don’t want our young people to feel hopeless. We don’t want our seniors hungry and destitute. We want people employed. We want people to be secure and comfortable in their golden years.”

Stability is important for a business, important for a farm, just as it is for a family, and it is another important reason why I support this bill.

Speaker, I would be remiss to not take a brief moment to at least recognize the important role that the agricultural community plays in all of our lives every day. They grow the food we eat, provide the milk we drink and play a foundational role in the economy in our province and across the country. The reach of their industry extends far and wide.

We are all well aware of the rise in obesity rates across North America and the effect that this has on the well-being of our citizens, and the cost it has on our health care system. As a teacher, I am reminded of the importance of food literacy, which is a topic also endorsed by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and that the greatest indicator of a healthy diet is not what you eat but where that food is from.

Generally speaking, the closer we are to where our food is produced, the better it tends to be for us. In schools, we talk about nutrition, and locally grown food needs to be a part of that conversation. Fruits and veggies

that ripen on the vine, in the field or on the tree have far more nutrients than those that ripen in a cargo container. Sometimes the simplest answer is the best one, and when it comes to food literacy, there are few better pieces of advice than increasing the amount of locally grown produce in your diet.

On a side note, if I may, for anyone that is interested, it is worth taking a look into the Good Food Box program from FoodShare. It's basically a subscription service for local produce that provides members with a box of fresh, in-season fruits and vegetables on a weekly, bi-weekly or monthly cycle, all for the purpose of fostering community development and promoting healthy eating. I think any time that we can bring the community and health together, we're going to strengthen our societies.

As I've stated a few times now, I may not be a farmer, but, as I said in my inaugural speech back in July, I did talk about my affection and affinity for backyard gardening. When it's a little bit less chilly than it is now, I tend to spend whatever time I can growing heirloom and organic vegetables and herbs in my backyard. Though my production output may not be on the same scale as my esteemed colleague from Timiskaming-Cochrane—

Mr. John Vanthof: It's bigger right now.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Well, it's the best I can do in my limited acreage, and I have also contended with—maybe not invasive—well, invasive species, but they're rabbits, and we can talk about what to do about rabbits and all the things that ate my cucumbers another time. But I digress.

The point is, the agricultural community plays a foundational role not only in the economy of Ontario but in the well-being of all Ontarians.

1700

It is an unfortunate fact, but a fact nonetheless, that food bank usage in Ontario has increased by 20% since 2008. Feed the Need Durham is an organization in my riding founded on the principle that hunger should not be the reason to prevent anyone from the chance to fulfill their potential. As an extension of that principle, they provide not only non-perishable foods and items but also distribute fresh produce to 46 member agencies across Durham region. Though I may be getting a little off topic, I like to take every opportunity I can to mention Feed the Need Durham and thank them for the incredible work they and all those member agencies do in our community. And, by extension, the families and community members they support appreciate having fresh fruits and vegetables on their tables at home.

The point is, the impact of the agricultural community is far-reaching. So it is important that we, as legislators, listen to the industry and work with them to pass the changes they need to grow, if you'll pardon the pun. That is what this bill does, albeit more than a little late and in the form of little more than enabling legislation, but ultimately a necessary step toward necessary change for farmers across the province.

Before my time expires, I wish to remind the government that their job is not complete and that there

are still regulations that need to be drafted before live-stock farmers and other producers are protected under the insurance program. New funding will also be needed unless the government decides to institute further cuts elsewhere as well. I ask that these changes are made promptly and properly to permit the best possible environment for our agricultural community to grow and flourish.

I thank all those who will speak today and have spoken before on An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act. I thank the minister for tabling this bill, delayed or not, and I thank my esteemed colleague the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane for his expertise and experience on this particular subject. Most importantly, I thank the agricultural sector for all the reasons we have discussed here today.

Our three parties may disagree on a lot of things, but this is one we fortunately do agree on. This bill is about ensuring stability for an industry that creates hundreds of thousands of jobs and infuses tens of billions of dollars into our economy. So it's important that it is passed promptly and that the necessary regulations follow suit. It isn't just that we all need to eat; we need to eat well, we need to eat healthfully, and we need to support our farmers and our agricultural sector as they endeavor to provide that for us.

Thank you again for this opportunity to speak to Bill 40. I look forward to voting in favour at second reading.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris): Questions and comments? I recognize the member from Brampton-Mississauga South.

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: Mississauga-Brampton South, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak on Bill 40, the agricultural insurance act. In my opinion, the proposed Bill 40 reflects changes to modern agriculture in the province of Ontario.

As parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, I'm well aware of the impact of climate on agricultural production. Climate change is known to be responsible for some of the severe weather phenomena that Ontario has experienced in recent memory: flooding, ice storms, drought and severe thunderstorms. It can also lead to crop infestation and disease. Climate change may cause damage to property, including crops, infrastructure and the natural environment.

Fresh in our minds is the ice storm of December 2013. Thick ice knocked out power for days and, in some cases, fallen trees toppled wires and made streets impassable. As we move to confront climate change, we must also make certain that we better manage the financial risk of this damage, as Bill 40 will do.

Food producers create jobs in rural and urban ridings like Mississauga-Brampton South. It's very important. Improving insurance for the agriculture sector makes sense and it is a sound economic policy.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to make a few comments with regards to Bill 40.

I think that the government's direction here is an appropriate one—to be looking at the way in which we can provide the kind of support to the vagaries of agriculture, and the need for a wider group of crops to be recognized. But I also want to just remind the government that when they're talking about this, they're also talking about sustainability.

There are many concerns under the broader title of agricultural sustainability—certainly more than I can fit in here in the time available. But the one message I'd like to convey to the government, in looking at not only how to provide the kind of support that Bill 40 does, is also to look at the land classification system.

In too many places there is only recognition of class 1 agricultural land. In fact, there are four classes of agricultural land. Class 4 doesn't mean that it can't be used. I think it's really important for land use planning to be able to look at that potential, to look at all four classes and how they support each other in different crop ways.

This is something that I'm aware the OFA is concerned about. I'm also aware of the fact that many land use planning directives neglect looking at all four classifications as appropriate classifications to maintain the kind of sustainability we must have.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm absolutely thrilled to be able to stand to comment on the member from Oshawa and her 20-minute debate she did on this legislation, Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act.

As I was listening to the member, I was learning about what this legislation actually means. What it really does is it changes the act from saying “agricultural crops” and “perennial plants” to now just “agricultural products.” It opens up the basket to make sure that more people can use this insurance.

I heard that this is really only enabling legislation, and that more needs to be done to ensure that folks really can get the proper insurance they need. But a lot of the stuff that she talked about—and of course, we cannot pass up this opportunity of making sure that we have healthy food on the table.

Today, for instance, the RNAO was here. The top three things they asked for, which are helpful to put food on the table, were raising the minimum wage to \$14 an hour and ensuring enforcement of fair labour standards; investing 1% of Ontario's budget to address the repair backlog of affordable housing and to create new affordable housing; and increasing the dangerously low social assistance rates so that they reflect the actual cost of living.

Doing these things can ensure that we get healthy food on everybody's tables and that we're not just counting on our food banks for a healthy box to make sure that happens. I know that Ontario is plentiful; we need to make sure that everybody gets a piece of that pie.

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

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm very happy to speak in the House today and to show my full support for Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act (Amending the Crop Insurance Act, 1996), put forth by the Honourable Jeff Leal, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, who does a great job for our farming community.

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The bill amends the Crop Insurance Act of 1996 to expand the insurance. Currently the act applies to “agricultural crops” and “perennial plants.” The bill would expand the act so that it would apply to all agriculture products that are designated by the minister for regulation.

The insurance unveiled by Bill 40 puts more commodities under that umbrella, and that's the long and short of this. It hasn't been updated since 1996. It's long overdue. If passed—and I certainly hope it will be—Bill 40 would expand Agricorp, which covers production losses and yield reductions caused by insured losses for vegetables, fruit and honey, forage—which is grasses and other plants that are eaten by animals such as cows, and perennial plants. There is no doubt that there needs to be an expansion of the list of agriculture products under Ontario's Agricorp. Today's threats of invasive species, volatile agriculture commodity markets and increasing frequency of very extreme weather events—something called “climate control”—are amongst just a few of those reasons.

I can tell you that my relatives came to this area, the GTA, from Tipperary, Ireland, back in 1846. They landed in Pickering, in Cherrywood. They were farmers: the Teefys. They ended up with several farms. They now have farms across Ontario. They have done just wonderful, wonderful things, and they would have been thrilled with this legislation today. As they look down upon me—as most Irish people do, they'll say, “Thank you very much.”

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Oshawa, you have two minutes to respond.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much for the thoughtful comments from the members in the Legislature from Mississauga–Brampton South and York–Simcoe, my colleague from Hamilton Mountain, and my neighbour from Ajax–Pickering.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to stand in the Legislature for any reason, but this was a bit new for me. I don't come from a farming background per se. We may not think of farms in Oshawa, but we are surrounded by fields and farms. At a morning at one of our vibrant farmers' markets, you can see the showcase of what surrounds us and what we're able to easily access and benefit from.

My introduction to farming since being elected was the trip to the International Plowing Match. While that was a great opportunity to connect with the agricultural community in a big way, I think it's important for us as legislators to recognize that our role is more than to have our picture taken with a shiny tractor. I was on the float that was actually driven by a shiny tractor—well, it

wasn't that shiny, but a tractor that was driven by our member from Timiskaming-Cochrane—and it is wonderful as a caucus to be able to draw from our strengths and our backgrounds in that way.

While I said that I may not come from a farming background—I had the opportunity to speak about this before—my father has decided to become a farmer in his retirement, and he has wonderful adventures that I can learn from. I've learned that there is such a thing as a deer fence: that you have to build a fence of a certain height to keep the deer from hopping into your orchard and the area where you're growing your goodies. I get to hear stories about that. He has also built a chicken coop, and has wonderful stories about chickens and roosters. While this bill may not affect him, I think we can all appreciate that farming hits very close to home on our table.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to get involved in the debate for Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act, an act to amend the Crop Insurance Act, 1996. I appreciate the chance to speak and to bring the perspective of the outstanding farm and agri-food sector in the great riding of Leeds-Grenville.

First of all, I just want to say off the top, just like the agricultural community and the Ontario PC caucus's previous speakers, that I am supportive of Bill 40. I am proud of the great relationship that I have with the agriculture producers and agribusinesses in Leeds-Grenville. We regularly meet to discuss concerns within the industry, and I've had the chance over the last couple of months to meet with a variety of local producers and groups in my riding, which include the Leeds county milk committee, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario's St. Lawrence/Ottawa Valley district, and the Grain Farmers of Ontario, district 13. I also had the opportunity to join producers in my riding at last month's Dairy Farmers of Ontario 50th anniversary banquet and, just last week, the Beef Farmers of Ontario AGM.

Finally, I should also add that I was pleased to join Minister Leal himself for a meeting with a group of young farmers from my riding when he made a whirlwind trip through Leeds-Grenville at the end of January. It was a great discussion at the Verburg family farm on the challenges facing the new generation of farmers who desperately want to carry on the family tradition.

I'd like to think that the time I invest in cultivating my relationships with agricultural producers in Leeds-Grenville gives me a fairly good understanding of some of the concerns.

It's interesting, in the context of today's debate, that the topic of production insurance really doesn't come up a lot when you have those types of meetings with the farmers in your riding. It's not that it's not an important issue, but when the priority comes for farmers and farm families, this isn't the one they decide they want to talk to me about.

However, what they do want to talk about, like most constituents, is the rising cost of electricity as a result of

this government's mismanagement of that sector. The ever-rising cost of energy doesn't just hurt industries. The soaring price farmers are paying to keep the lights on and operate their equipment is devouring more and more of whatever income the family can produce. Unlike industries that we see packing up and leaving the province for greener pastures and cheaper energy, our farmers can't take their land somewhere else to do their business. For them, the only option would be to leave the farm altogether. That's an issue Bill 40 can't resolve, obviously, because there is no insurance against this government's costly energy blunders.

Whenever I'm with any of the groups I met with earlier—people like the Christian farmers, the OFA, egg farmers, beef farmers, dairy producers or any other farm group—I appreciate the fact that when you meet with them, they give you the straight goods. They don't waste their time talking around an issue. They don't really have that time to waste. They cut right to the point. I'm going to follow their lead when it comes to issues around Bill 40. They look at me, and they say, "Steve, this idea to expand production insurance beyond crops is a good idea." They say that we should support the bill.

They're telling me this because they know, when it comes to offering producers insurance for a broad range of agricultural products, that we here in Ontario trail every other province. In fact, I was very disappointed to learn that we're the last province to do this. It's especially disappointing, because we know how much our farm and food sector means to our economy. When you look at the economic impact they have, the figures are really staggering.

The sector sustains 760,000 jobs in Ontario and is directly responsible for some \$34 billion worth of economic activity annually. What those numbers tell us is that the food we're producing is not only critical to our basic needs—we have to eat to live, after all—but this industry is the backbone of our provincial economy. I don't think we truly appreciate the significant role the farm sector plays in our economy, and that's why it's so critical for us to ensure that it is healthy and sustainable. That's why I share the view of the farmers in my riding who say that Bill 40 is a welcome piece of legislation. In it, we're finally seeing this government take the long overdue step of creating a production insurance program that will go beyond crops and perennial plants.

I would point out something raised with me by an OFA official when I asked them for some feedback on Bill 40. While they called it a good-news story, they questioned why it has taken so long for the government to act on this. In fact, they pointed me to a 2003 federal-provincial agriculture policy framework that highlighted the need to expand crop insurance to other farm products. That's 11 years ago. No wonder the farmers I represent are asking one question of me and also to the minister: Why did this take so long?

I think there are some fair questions about the timing of the bill. Why, after 11 years of waiting, would the government act now on an issue they know has widespread support among the agriculture sector? We know

over here that nothing happens by accident when it comes to the timing of legislation, and I agree with one suggestion that's been made during this debate: I think the true motivation here is the heat that the government has been taking from the farm community over neonicotinoids. I know the government threw science out the window when it announced an 80% reduction in the use of neonics by 2017. Already we're hearing from the Grain Farmers of Ontario that it's going to cost their sector \$630 million a year. I wonder if the grain and oilseed producers in my riding can get some insurance for those losses.

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I also want to bring forward the frustration that farmers have expressed to me about this government not doing its homework. They look at the government's own recommendations from the Bee Health Working Group. Again, what they said to me was that farmers should implement some of the new best practices that are being discussed. They've made some gains. I think bee deaths will reduce by 70%.

They're telling me that they did their part. They have worked with the government; they decided to be partners. Yet the government turned around and made their announcement without that consultation. Judging from what I heard when I had a chance to drop in to the grain farmers' region 13 AGM in Elgin, I don't think Bill 40 is going to make the problem go away for government. They were very concerned, and they expressed it to me that day.

I also feel that we need to talk about the fact that this piece of legislation also has to deal with regulations. If you read through the bill, it's very short, just five pages, which includes the cover and the explanatory note. Really, when you look at the bill, it doesn't say that much; it just amends the title of the Crop Insurance Act, adds a few definitions, and substitutes a lot of language in the act which was passed in 1996. What Bill 40 does is it gives the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs the ability to create the new production insurance program, but again, there's the issue of the regulations. I certainly hope they show a little more urgency than they have shown over the last 11 years.

When you read through the bill, the key part for people to pay attention to is the one where the act is amended to add the following:

“Regulations by minister

“11.1 The minister may make regulations,

“(a) designating agricultural products for the purposes of this act;

“(b) defining any word or expression used in this act that has not already been expressly defined in this act.”

This is where we're giving the minister the authority to make the regulations that will determine how Ontario's new production insurance program is going to operate.

As I said earlier this week when I was talking about Bill 31, this legislation is another example of the devil being in the details of those regulations when they are

being brought forward by the minister. That means the answers to the most important questions that farmers I represent have about this program are unknown. So we're not debating the actual program, and the unknown aspect is a concern to farmers, to myself and, I think, to our entire caucus.

I want to pick up on a point made by our critic on the file, the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, who made this point in his lead-off back before the House rose for Christmas. He pointed out that neither the minister nor his parliamentary assistant, in opening the debate on Bill 40, offered much insight into what this program is going to look like. They've made commitments about consulting closely with the federal government and with farmers—and certainly we're going to hold them to that and make sure those talks do happen—but there's still reason for concern because we know this government doesn't exactly have a sterling record when it comes to implementing new programs. I can mention the Green Energy Act. I can talk about some of the other programs they've had difficulty with, things like Ornge and eHealth and MaRS. I see the Minister of Community and Social Services is across from me. That SAMS debacle is just another case of the government not implementing a program. On that program, the SAMS program, my constituency office is right beside an ODSP office. It's right next door. I was hearing about problems with that program before they even happened.

So it's quite reasonable for us to express concern about how the minister is going to carry out this process on how Bill 40 will get through once the bill goes to committee. After seeing how the government dealt with two bills this week—by moving to close debate—this bill will probably have the same thing happen to it next week some time.

I just want to talk briefly about some questions and concerns that farmers have raised to me about the new program. Certainly a primary concern of theirs will be the cost of the program. We know production insurance costs are shared by the province, which pays 24%; the feds, who pay 36%; and of course the farmers, who pay the remaining 40%.

We're talking about a significant change here to create an insurance program that extends coverage to additional agricultural products, including livestock and bees. While the change from just crops and perennial plants to other commodities is a good idea and one that's long overdue, the fact is, it's going to cost more. We need to know, then, how the government plans to pay for it. The last thing we want to do, in establishing a new production insurance program, is to drain funds away from the existing programs that Ontario's agricultural sector relies on for support.

The critic also questioned whether there would be incentives available to encourage farmers to buy into the new crop insurance program. One of the questions, for example, that they've had is, will there be a premium holiday? That's something that I've heard on a number of occasions.

Farmers are going to be watching this program. They want to know the most obvious things: What is this going to cost me? How much time am I going to have to spend filling out paperwork? I hear that over and over again. One of the things that comes up at meetings all the time is this red tape, this filling out of paperwork.

I know our previous ag critic, the member for Oxford, exposed how big a problem this is in the agri-food sector. He did a survey that essentially said—and it was an unbelievable number—the farmers in the province spend 154.2 hours every year filling out government forms. That was part of his survey. Think about how hard these men and women work in the agricultural sector and the fact that they do such a good job, yet in addition to a 40-hour week, they've got this tremendous amount of time filling out paperwork.

In the few moments I have remaining, I want to talk about another issue that, during debate previously, I've always been on the record about—the government, when they have these consultations. It's one thing to have them; I want them to listen to people. I know the parliamentary assistant is making copious notes across from me.

I've said that I would love to have one of those consultation meetings in Kemptville because of what happened regarding Kemptville college. The minister will have to speak to his colleague at the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to see if the University of Guelph would even allow a meeting on that campus because I know that they've severely restricted the amount of bookings that take place at the college.

Again, I look at the debate, and I've read comments from people offering issues around farming, the fact that they're so concerned. It's almost been a year since the Kemptville college announcement was made by the University of Guelph. You have to ask, Speaker, what could be more important to the future of farming in this province than education? To me, it's critical.

The ministry went ahead and hired their provincial facilitator, Mr. Vanclief. He's a well-respected former federal minister. The minister and the ministry may think that they've solved all the problems of the world and they've answered all the questions on the future of Kemptville college with this report, but you know what, not by a long shot.

What he's accomplished with his announcement last month will take a very small step forward by agreeing with what everybody already supports, and that was to take the management of the campus and transfer it to the municipality of North Grenville. But there was nothing from the minister about the real issue, and that is the continuation of agriculture education in eastern Ontario. The reality is the minister and his colleague at training, colleges and universities need to show that this government is serious about partnering with a post-secondary institution to deliver those degree and diploma programs.

1730

I said it when the minister made the announcement. It's no surprise to me that Mr. Vanclief failed to find a

public or private institution ready to come forward. You look at his report and there are some glaring errors. About half a dozen institutions took the time to present a proposal. There was a lot of interest there, but there was no money put on the table. There was nothing put on the table to show.

I want to quote something the minister said in the opening remarks of this debate. Minister Leal said, and I quote, "While serving as Minister of Agriculture and Food, Premier Wynne issued the agri-food growth challenge. It calls on the sector to double its annual rate of growth and to create 120,000 new jobs by 2020." That's the quote, which is a great idea, but how do you expect a sector to grow like that when you're closing the institutions that provide the knowledge our agri-food and agri-business sectors need to remain competitive? The answer, as we all know, is that you can't. I simply don't understand why the minister has been so blind to this.

In my riding, the Leeds and Grenville economic development committee had a great economic development summit in North Grenville in the fall. It's just about a kilometre or two away from the Kemptville college campus. We all talked about the tremendous opportunities that were there if the government would just make the commitment.

I was given a copy of a report entitled Planning for Tomorrow for OAC: Input from Industry. It's a report that was done by the Ontario Agricultural College and the University of Guelph that looks at the needs of the agriculture and food sector. I've talked about this report to the minister previously, and I hope he has a copy by now. If he's read it, he will realize the disastrous decision the government made to allow the University of Guelph to close that 97-year-old tradition of ag excellence. I've only got a few minutes left, and I just want to share a few highlights of the report in the important context of the debate that we're having today.

Here's one eye-opening finding:

"The survey revealed the large gap that currently exists in Ontario in the supply of graduates trained in agriculture and food programs and the difficulties employers are having in finding suitably trained graduates."

Another section found that "demand in Ontario is three times supply for agricultural graduates at the bachelors level."

Finally, this conclusion: "Via this study, our interaction with industry indicates that there are significant unmet needs in the agriculture and food sector in Ontario in regard to the number of students being trained at diploma, undergraduate and graduate level in agriculture or food programs."

You can see why I and the entire eastern Ontario agriculture and food sector are so adamant that we need to maintain education and training at Kemptville college. Forget the future; we can't even meet today's needs. So I can't understand why the government, even though they've got this bill that is long overdue, cannot make a commitment to fill this unmet need, to make sure we've got young men and women coming forward to be our

next generation of farmers. We can't meet the demand now. How are we going to create 120,000 new jobs when we're not having graduates at the degree, diploma and undergraduate level? The ministry needs to stop and take a look at their decision and reverse what happened one year ago.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to once again stand in this House and to comment on the member for Leeds–Grenville regarding Bill 40. Although we disagree philosophically on many occasions, I would like to say it's an honour to work with the member for Leeds–Grenville on furthering the interests of the people of rural Ontario.

On this bill, we've all spoken in favour. This bill is enabling legislation, and it's going to go forward. It's 10 years too late. Where the devil is in the details is in how this bill is actually going to be funded and if it's going to be funded with new funding or if some money is going to be taken out of another area, or if it's just going to lie dormant and then it will just be a press release. That's where the rubber is going to hit the road.

I have to say that this government has been a bit of a contradiction, as far as agriculture goes. I'll give an example: Right now we've heard that we want to focus a lot more on jobs, and one of the focuses is northern agriculture, bringing agriculture to northern Ontario. Good idea. But some people might not know this: In one of the best places for agriculture in northern Ontario, in the little clay belt around Temiskaming Shores, this government is now allowing solar farms to be built on the best land we have in northern Ontario. Why? Because in northern Ontario there is no land designation. So while this government says that they want to promote agriculture in northern Ontario, they stand idly by while on the best land in the Temiskaming district—tile-drained, cleared, farmed for a hundred years—they're building solar farms.

Again, if you want to talk about agriculture, let's talk about agriculture and let's fix the problems right away. Let's designate the land in all of Ontario, not just in southern Ontario.

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

Mr. Han Dong: I'm pleased to respond to the member from Leeds–Grenville's debate on this bill. I'm pleased to hear that in essence he supports the bill and he thinks that it's going to be welcomed by the farmers.

Representing an urban riding, I just want to say that we completely appreciate the farmers' contribution to society as a whole in Ontario. They do feed us. We walk the streets and talk to condo owners. They're so passionate about fresh and locally grown food. So I think it's very appropriate for me to respond to this.

I would like to point to the Open Ontario strategy that the Premier has been talking about. In fact, the minister responsible for international trade will be travelling with the minister for rural affairs and agriculture very soon to promote Ontario agri-foods. I think that is needed. These

are bold moves to build a brand to promote what we are best at here and the best of our agriculture products. I think that this bill will broaden the coverage for farmers and will encourage the introduction of new produce and products. I'm very confident that this bill will give farmers additional protection when it comes to a natural disaster or anything that they couldn't foresee.

I look forward to further debates on this bill.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise and provide comment on the member from Leeds–Grenville's comments about, basically, the legislation that's going to increase insurance—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Production insurance coverage, yes, for additional agricultural products. He spoke about many things within the bill, but I want to commend him for his action in fighting the closure of Kemptville College and the agriculture courses there. He was a champion and went there. They've still continued to close agriculture programs there, which is opposite to what the government—they want to—

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes, they want sustainable agriculture. We have thousands and thousands of farmers across the province who want to stay in agri-business. They want their families to stay in agri-business if they can, and yet they closed down the Kemptville College agriculture courses. It's actually unacceptable, and I want to commend the member for Leeds–Grenville for his tenacity in fighting that on his own home turf, for fighting for all of us to stop that closure of Kemptville College.

He also mentioned comments about the frustration with the red tape in the business of agriculture. In fact, surveys have said that three out of five farmers wouldn't have gone into the business if they'd known about the red tape and the paperwork involved in the agriculture sector. I think that's just terrible, but I tell you, that's what I hear.

1740

Interjection: It's the reality.

Ms. Laurie Scott: It is the reality out there. This is a paperwork process.

Expansion of the insurance program: We're not opposed to it; we agree with it. We're lacking a lot of details. How frustrating is it going to be to apply, if you can? And if we're putting more farmers out of business, how many are going to actually be in business to apply for a program that could be very frustrating?

Unfortunately, that's all my time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the ability—

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this bill and the speeches of my colleagues.

As you're well aware, Speaker, agricultural insurance is one of the fundamental tools that we need to protect farmers, to protect rural Ontario. But what we have

before us is just enabling legislation. The government is going to have to bring forward regulations; it's going to actually have to put funding on the table before we know if this is of substance or not. My colleague from Timiskaming spoke very well about whether there's actually going to be new money on the table—or is this just a rearrangement of titles, a reprinting of bills with new names on them? Is it actually going to be substantive for the farmers in this province whose production we in the cities depend on?

Right now, we have a bill, the Crop Insurance Act, that applies only to a limited, designated group of crops and products. This bill changes the name of the act. That's not a bad thing, but I don't know how substantial it is. It changes the name of the Ontario Crop Insurance Fund. Again, who can dislike renaming a fund? But is it going to change things?

There are no regulatory changes attached to this bill that we're aware of. There's no indication that funding will be attached to actually implement this bill. So I ask, and I would hope the government would speak to this: What, substantively, will we get out of this, other than name changes? Will there be funding? Will it make a difference to producers of all agricultural products in Ontario? Will we actually see regulations come forward? Will there be public consultation on those regulations so we'll actually be able to judge if something substantive has been done for Ontario?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Leeds–Grenville, you have two minutes.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to thank the speakers from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Trinity–Spadina, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and Toronto–Danforth for their questions and comments. Again, I want to thank all the members for their attentiveness and their comments previously. I got a thumbs-up from the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, so maybe that's a good sign. Hopefully, it's a thumbs-up for money for Kemptville College. I don't know, but we'll see.

The member for Toronto–Danforth hit the nail on the head of what I said earlier. You've got a piece of enabling legislation that ultimately the government will have to put some dollars on the table for. Again, I just worry, with the last year of my life, with the University of Guelph's decision with Kemptville college—the frustration that the province would appoint a facilitator yet not make a decision to put dollars on the table to show those post-secondary educational institutions that they're serious.

I want to go back to the minister's opening remarks in this debate, when you praised the Premier as a former Minister of Agriculture and Food. We're going to have so much difficulty getting this Agri-Food Growth Challenge for jobs to be able to have 120,000 new jobs by 2020. We've got a problem in this province. Our own reports are showing that demand in Ontario is three times the supply of agriculture graduates at the bachelor level. If you're going to look at 120,000 new jobs, and you've

already got demand exceeding supply three to one, how are you going to have that extra growth in jobs when you don't have young men and women who want to take on the family farm have an opportunity to have education close to home? The beauty of my campus was the fact that kids could go to school and then help on the family farm.

We need a commitment by this government.

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

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's an honour to rise once again, twice today in this House, and to speak to Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act.

As my colleagues have previously mentioned here over the last couple of days, the bill is long overdue and it's about time that Ontario keeps pace with other provinces in this country. By extending this crop insurance, it would provide protection to all agriculture products. At the moment, it only applies to agricultural crops and perennial plants and leaves out other products like livestock. By amending the act, it will expand the scope to include all agricultural products.

I would like to talk about the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who actually did his one-hour lead yesterday, I believe. He talked about being happy that this bill is coming to fruition finally after its impetus was passed 11 years ago at a federal-provincial agricultural ministers meeting, back in 2003. So it has taken 11 years, Speaker. In his introductory remarks, the parliamentary assistant to the minister said the bill was moving with haste. If it takes 11 years for this government to move on desperately needed legislation when it's moving in haste, I'm not sure we want to know what normal speeds are.

From my critic portfolio, if you ask the members of the AODA Alliance, they would be sure to tell you quickly how long it takes this government to act on its promises. They were promised improvements to accessibility standards in this province 10 years ago. Yesterday, we just learned that the only thing they are going to receive is further cuts to the enforcement measures.

Another important thing, and a lot of members have spoken to it, is that this is merely a framework. It amends the name, it amends the act, but it's a framework. By definition, it is more broadly defined. But it does not specify what it's going to cover, who it's going to cover, if there is going to be any money on the table or if there are going to be any time targets. I think the government owes it to the Legislature, to the agricultural community and to the province's economy to move forward with this in a timely way, being that it has been on the books for 11 years.

Most importantly, it will be up to the government to ensure that it's an inclusive process of consultation; that the farmers, the researchers, the policy advisers, the communities and associations all have a chance to have their say on this legislation. I need not remind us of what happens when the government doesn't heed the advice of those facing issues on the ground on a daily basis. In the last few years that I've been here, we've witnessed this: the wasted money, in the case of this Liberal government,

billions of dollars, you get with an Ornge scandal that's still under OPP investigation, an eHealth crisis that has not yet been resolved, P3s wasting \$8.2 billion of taxpayers' money; or you have a government entangled in an OPP investigation—three, I think; one as a result of the election rules being broken.

In my critic area, we have the issue of the SAMS program as well, affecting thousands of people on Ontario Works and on Ontario disability support payments, \$250 million spent on a program that's not working. Now we're going to have to spend some more money actually bringing in a peer reviewer to try to fix the problems. It's very important, I think, that this issue move forward in a timely way.

One of the reasons that the SAMS program is broken is because the government failed to heed the advice of front-line staff and managers who were sending red flags and warnings for many months and who actually begged the government not to move forward in December until we got all the kinks out. But that didn't happen. We've seen system failures lead to massive budget cuts later on in order to compensate for this government's waste.

We have the ability to do the right thing here, and I urge the government to take those next steps. We have 14,000 farmers in this province who cover an average of five million acres that have crop insurance. It's good to finally be moving forward with a framework that will protect all of these five million acres.

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As it stands, there are no regulatory changes nor any funding with the bill. As we've seen far too often with this government, action is hard to come by. I urge the government to move hastily to start the consultation.

Although I've never been a farmer, I have a riding that encompasses a large farming community in Wainfleet, and so these issues are important to my community as well.

We all enjoy our fine Niagara wines. We talked a bit about wine in private members' business a while ago. I hope that we all do our best to support our local economies and to buy local wine. According to my friend and CEO of the Grape Growers of Ontario, Debbie Zimmerman, Ontario's grape and wine industry is a \$3.3-billion economy to this province and employs over 14,000 people. She says that crop insurance is one of the risk management tools that grape growers count on in difficult years. It provides a cushion for those farmers in the event of environmental damage because of the elements.

I'm sure we all remember last year's polar vortex as we were doing by-elections in Fort Erie and Niagara-on-the-Lake. Those frigid temperatures aren't just horrible memories implanted in our minds; they've left their mark on the Niagara region and on the wine industry. Derek Saunders, who founded the Calamus Estate Winery near Beamsville, adds that anyone who tried to shop for a local wine as of last summer will have noticed it was impossible to actually buy a 2014 Merlot or Sauvignon Blanc on any of the store shelves because it was the hardest hit.

The VineAlert program, which measures the bud survival rates in Ontario, estimates that only 50% of the buds survived last winter. Unfortunately, this winter will be a bad season as well for the wine industry as a result of the cold temperatures. Although the blankets of snow seem to be helping, there's no guarantee that it will save the crops.

As my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane previously mentioned, the issues of agriculture and the environment go hand in hand. It's inevitable that the more extreme weather we see, the more support our farming communities and our agricultural sector will need. The bill, in principle, will help provide the framework for these supports.

The recent cold temperatures in Ontario over the last few weeks in the Niagara area are going to cause severe crop damage to grapes and to tree fruits. Ryan Brewster, who is a field service manager, is anticipating a complete wipeout this year in Niagara for peaches, apricots and plums. Although the extent of the damage is too early to assess, it doesn't look good. The early signs are troubling, and it's too soon to tell for certain.

These people who I'm mentioning here in my remarks today are reassured about the principles of the bill, and that expanding coverage for the production losses or the yield reductions is good for agriculture. If it's good for agriculture, it's good for business, it's good for the economy, and it's good for the people who otherwise wouldn't be able to actually afford it. It seems that we all agree to the principles of this bill, but we need to know some of the other answers: Who will be included, what's the funding going to be like, what are the targets going to be like and all of those kinds of issues.

If this bill had been passed earlier—we've been waiting 11 years for it to come around—it might have helped the pork farmers dealing with PED and it might have helped the beef farmers dealing with BSE, more commonly known to us as mad cow disease. Those farmers took a big hit, and this kind of bill certainly would have helped them, if it applied to them.

I want to speak for a couple of minutes—I've got about four left—about bees, because bees are a real issue across this country and in particular in this province. Although they seem insignificant, without honey bees, the agricultural sector would be doomed. When the Minister of Agriculture and the parliamentary assistant presented this bill, there was no specific mention of honey bees, although the bee mortality rate had been on the rise since around 2006. Bees are pollinators, and as a result, our ecosystems rely on them. Our farmers especially rely on bees for pollination. In fact, it's believed that almost half of the leading crops—apples, soybeans, cocoa, almonds—rely on pollination, and it's about a \$212-billion value. Crops couldn't reproduce without them.

Some blame pesticide use. The neonicotinoids, a pesticide that was banned last year, were believed to contain very low levels of toxicity to many insects. In 2013, a review of the neonicotinoids showed that, as they are typically used, they harm bees, and safer alternatives are needed.

Before I close here, Speaker, I want to just talk a bit about this interesting phenomenon that happens in my riding. It happens to be one of the places where wild and domestic bees thrive. It's an area that has been appropriately named the Niagara Beeway. It's about a two-kilometre swath on either side of the Welland Canal and, bizarrely enough, completely unaffected by the phenomenon of bee colony collapse. It seems to be a place where bee colonies continue to thrive. Beehives can be found on either side of the canal in trees, in factories, in churches and even in homes. Local organizations work with the beekeepers to ensure that these swarms of bees are captured, free of charge. They're later used for apprenticeship programs and training for new generations of beekeepers—so great for Welland and great for the province.

George Scott, my friend and president of the Niagara Beeway, told me that the small beekeepers actually welcome this bill as a positive turn in the sweep of bad news happening at every corner in the bee industry. If honeybees were included in this bill, it would provide beekeepers with a safety net to fall back on in the case of a bad colony loss.

What George did mention is that many large beekeepers often pay the price for previous beekeepers overstating their losses to insurance companies. Because verifying larger bee yards comes at a higher price to inspectors, it's rarely done, therefore, leaving enormous incentives to overstate those losses on claims. Unfortunately, Speaker, as with most cases of bad apples—while we're speaking about this bill—everyone ends up paying the price. The largest beekeepers end up receiving

delayed payment as a result of this, while the smaller bee yards get their claims returned in a timely manner.

Forget the administrative delays—these interruptions naturally then cause delays in replacing colonies. For example, if a beekeeper loses a yield of bees late in the year, they need to replace them immediately. The life cycle and the payment of the crop insurance don't mesh a lot of the time, Speaker. That's what I'm being told.

Lastly, another common denominator in all of my conversations is that losses aren't always claimed because the current paperwork required under the crop insurance plan is an administrative nightmare. It's time-consuming. It is inaccessible. As a result of that, we're not even capturing all of the losses of farmers in this province. I hope that this bill, when it actually has some meat on the bones, addresses some of those issues that the beekeepers in our agricultural sector are wanting to rely on in their small businesses.

Ultimately, the insurance act bill is one that we as New Democrats will be supporting. It's desperately needed—for over a decade, almost 11 years—and one that should have been implemented sooner. It's now up to the government to table the plans that actually go with the bill. We hope it doesn't take another 11 years for that to happen.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): This House stands adjourned until next Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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