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Wednesday 25 March 2015

Mercredi 25 mars 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 25 mars 2015

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

POOLED REGISTERED PENSION
PLANS ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LES RÉGIMES
DE PENSION AGRÉÉS COLLECTIFS

Mr. Sousa moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to create a framework for pooled registered pension plans and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 57, Loi créant un cadre pour les régimes de pension agréés collectifs et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Sousa.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'll be sharing my time with the member from Etobicoke Centre.

I'm pleased to stand today in the House for second reading of Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014. As you know, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to implementing innovative retirement savings tools. We're doing this to help ensure that Ontarians are able to enjoy their retirement years. The Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014, would make it possible to offer individuals a new type of retirement savings vehicle. It is one that is voluntary, low-cost and tax assisted. It's called the pooled registered pension plan or PRPP.

If passed, this bill would make possible an important new retirement savings option. It would make it easier for Ontario employees and the self-employed to save for retirement at a low cost. If passed, this would be a key step toward improving retirement income security.

Mr. Speaker, you may know that many of today's workers are not saving enough for tomorrow, and that gap is worsening over time. Today's younger workers are faced with an undersaving challenge: the challenge of saving enough for a secure retirement. Canada's retirement income system worked reasonably well for existing retirees; however, Ontario's workers today face a number of key factors that contribute to the undersaving challenge.

First, workplace pension plan coverage is low. Indeed, in 2012, only 34% of workers in Ontario had a workplace pension. In the private sector, only 28% were benefiting

from membership in a pension plan. The reasons for this vary. Many employers have found that workplace pension plans are costly and difficult to administer. This is particularly so with small and medium-sized businesses. It is also particularly true with defined benefit plans.

Other employers have seen their plans hit by low long-term interest rates and poor investment returns. Some 16% of workers didn't even participate in a workplace pension, but they did contribute—at least some—to an individual or a group Registered Retirement Savings Plan, or RRSP.

As you know, RRSPs have tax benefits as an added incentive. In 2012, however, there was approximately \$730 billion in unused RRSP room in Canada, and that figure includes \$280 billion in Ontario alone. All in, this means that approximately 50% of Ontario workers did not contribute to either a workplace pension plan or an RRSP. That's not good news.

People are living longer. Average lifespans have been increasing in our province for some time, and this trend is likely to continue. Ontario men currently aged 65 can expect to live, on average, close to another 20 years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): That's good news.

Hon. Charles Sousa: That's good for you, Mr. Speaker, I know.

By 2035, they will live, on average, close to 25 more years. For women aged 65, life expectancy is currently 22 more years. This will rise to 25 by 2035.

Those over age 65 are a segment of our population that is growing. Over the next 20 years, the number of seniors in our province will almost double. That means there will be more than four million seniors in Ontario.

Increasing life expectancy, frankly, is a sign of higher living standards and healthier living, which is a good thing. But it also puts pressure on personal savings. It's putting pressure on the capacity of workplace pension plans to ensure lifelong income. That is because retirement can now potentially last for decades.

So why is this government concerned about this undersaving challenge? Not only does it compromise hard-working people being able to relax and enjoy a well-earned retirement; it has the potential, frankly, to compromise our shared values, goals and prosperity as a society as well. If a growing portion of our population face inadequate savings when they retire, they'll spend less in the future. This will reduce future economic growth, which will, in turn, put pressure on our publicly funded services like health care and education. That's why we need to take action now for the future.

Here's a little background on the retirement income system in Canada. There are three key elements. The first element includes publicly funded supplements for seniors. These supplements include Old Age Security, the guaranteed income supplement and provincial top-up programs. These benefits are based on residency and income eligibility criteria. The second element is the Canada Pension Plan, the CPP. It's a mandatory pension plan; a program for the employed and the self-employed. The CPP is funded by employer and employee contributions as well as investment earnings generated by the CPP Investment Board. The third element is a workplace pension plan and other tax-assisted retirement savings. These include, for example, defined benefit pension plans, targeted benefit multi-employer pension plans, defined contribution pension plans, Registered Retirement Savings Plans, deferred profit-sharing plans and, once available, pooled registered pension plans as well.

Experts recommend that people aim to replace 50% to 70% of their pre-retirement earnings to maintain a similar living standard in retirement. Yet, as a society, we are confronted by this undersaving challenge. In fact, analysis by my ministry, the Ministry of Finance, has found that more than 35% of households in Ontario may well be undersaving for retirement. To help with this challenge, in addition to implementing the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan in the 2014 budget, we've committed to introducing this legislative framework to allow for pooled registered pension plans.

The challenge we face in Ontario is recognized as well by the federal government in Canada; certainly by the ministry of finance federally, which has recognized that we do have challenges before us. The aging demographics that we're faced with are going to put more pressure—and if we don't look at providing a greater infusion of funding today, there are going to be more requirements on our social assistance programs later.

We know that many who do not have workplace pensions, which includes almost half of Ontarians, cannot survive on CPP alone, which is about \$10,000 on average.

0910

So today, implementing the PRPP, moving forward on this initiative, acts as yet another supplement, another ability for us to provide greater opportunities for Ontarians and for workers to provide for their long-term security.

Mr. Speaker, I would like now to share my time with my colleague the member for Etobicoke Centre, who will speak to the House further on details of this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members on the opposite side as well.

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

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's an honour to follow Minister Sousa in introducing this piece of legislation. Before I start to speak a little bit about the PRPP, I just want to share a quick story.

When I got elected this past June, I got advice from many people. One of the pieces of advice I got was from

someone in my community who said, "Yvan, never forget that you're here to represent the people of your community, the people of Etobicoke Centre. You should be working hard to improve their quality of life now but also into the future." That, to me, is what this bill is about. It's about securing the quality of life of Ontarians into the future. That's why I'm pleased to stand here in the House and give further details for second reading of Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014.

Many of the folks watching at home may be wondering, what exactly are pooled registered pension plans? As mentioned earlier, PRPPs are a new type of voluntary, tax-assisted individual retirement savings vehicles. As new, low-cost retirement savings vehicles that are professionally managed and portable from one workplace to another, they're intended to make it easier for employees and self-employed folks to save for retirement. PRPPs are vehicles for the self-employed to be able to invest their retirement savings at low cost.

Simply put, PRPPs are savings plans designed to provide retirement income for individuals who pay into them. Individuals have their own individual accounts into which contributions are made. Contributions are locked in and benefits at retirement are based on accumulated contributions and investment returns. Similar to other tax-assisted savings vehicles such as RRSPs, which many people are familiar with, individuals would not pay income tax on their PRPP contributions and investment returns until they withdraw their funds.

The thing is that PRPPs differ slightly from RRSPs in a number of important respects, and I'd like to highlight what those are. Individuals' accounts are, first of all, pooled for investment purposes—that is different. Contributions are locked in until an individual reaches retirement age. The third thing is, legislation requires that PRPPs be provided at low cost and administrators are held to a higher legal standard of care. Similar to registered pension plan contributions, employer PRPP contributions are tax-deductible, which is of great benefit both to the employee and to the employer who is making those contributions. Those contributions are not subject to employer health tax, employment insurance premiums, Canada Pension Plan contributions or workers' compensation premiums.

What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that more Ontarians who are employees or self-employed will have access to another voluntary savings vehicle.

After two years of federal-provincial-territorial collaboration in the development and design of PRPPs, the federal government implemented PRPPs for sectors under federal jurisdiction, such as employees in the banking, interprovincial transportation and communication sectors. The federal legislation also applies to people employed or self-employed in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

The federal Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, or PRPP Act, and associated regulations came into force in December 2012. The federal PRPP Act enables corporations such as banks and insurance companies to be the

administrators of PRPPs, and sets out rules for establishing and administering those PRPPs.

Let me touch briefly on some of the key characteristics of the federal PRPP legislation.

First of all, licensing and registration requirements: Administrators would be required to obtain a licence and to register PRPPs before making them available to employers and individuals.

Secondly, administrator duties: Administrators would have a fiduciary duty to plan members.

Thirdly, voluntary participation by employers: Employers would choose whether to offer their employees a PRPP as a retirement savings tool. Again, this is giving options to employers to help contribute to the retirement savings of their employees.

Automatic enrolment of employees: Where an employer elects to offer a PRPP, enrolment of employees would be automatic unless an employee chooses to opt out within a 60-day period. So employees are offered the PRPP by employers who choose to do so, but again have the option of opting out if they don't see it as being to their individual benefit. So there's a lot of flexibility there.

Portability between workplaces: Employees would be able to transfer their PRPP assets to a new workplace PRPP, allowing them to easily consolidate their retirement savings account; again, offering employees flexibility with their retirement savings.

In terms of setting contribution rates, PRPP members' contribution rates would be determined by the administrator.

Voluntary contributions by employers: The employer would determine whether or not to contribute to their employees' PRPPs; again, offering the employer flexibility, just as we're offering the employee flexibility.

Locked-in contributions: An individual would not be able to access his or her PRPP retirement savings, subject to certain prescribed exceptions, until the age of 55.

Low cost: PRPPs provide professional investment management at a low cost to plan members by pooling the funds of all individual accounts for investment purposes, as well as limiting the investment options provided to plan members. Again, this facilitates a low-cost plan and therefore greater returns for plan members.

It's easy to offer. PRPPs involve fewer administrative responsibilities for employers than a traditional pension plan. Again, keeping administration down and keeping the cost down maximizes returns for employees, and therefore retirement savings.

Now, let me clarify, Mr. Speaker: Legislation must be passed by each province before PRPPs can be made available to individuals employed in provincially regulated sectors and self-employed individuals working in the provinces. As a result, PRPPs will not be available to the majority of Ontarians until legislation is passed by this House and proclaimed in force, and once supporting regulations have been made.

The purpose of the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014, which we're speaking about today, is to pro-

vide a legal framework for the establishment and administration of PRPPs in Ontario to benefit employees and self-employed folks in our province. It would apply to individuals employed in provincially regulated employment, to the self-employed in Ontario, as well as to individuals employed in federally regulated industries in Ontario whose employers do not offer PRPPs. As someone who has been self-employed and who has run my own business, I can see this is something that would be highly beneficial to me and to many folks across Ontario who don't have as many savings options for retirement as those who are employed and are offered plans by their employers.

Given the desire to harmonize PRPPs across the country, the proposed legislation adopts many of the key features of the federal PRPP legislative framework that I was referring to earlier. To date, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have passed legislation establishing PRPP frameworks that largely mirror the federal government's model. Consistent with the approach taken by other provinces, Bill 57, which we're talking about today, largely adopts the federal framework, including the key features of the federal model that I discussed earlier.

But this proposed legislation includes Ontario-specific features as well, where provincial law and/or processes are required to apply, or where additional provisions are required for added clarity or consistency with Ontario's minimum pension standards legislation. For example, valuation and division of a member's PRPP funds on marriage or spousal relationship breakdown would be consistent with Ontario's Family Law Act and the Pension Benefits Act, as would the definition of "spouse." This is an example.

In practice, we might expect PRPPs to work as follows—I want to walk through this, because I think that a lot of folks aren't familiar with PRPPs and I'd like to talk just a little bit about how this might work in practice. Employers who choose to offer PRPPs to their employees would be responsible for selecting and entering into a contract with a third-party PRPP administrator, such as a bank or insurance company, that is qualified to provide the service. The administrator would then be responsible for managing the PRPP investments that are made by employers and employees, and for communicating with plan members on matters related to their PRPP.

If an employer chooses to offer a PRPP, an employee would be automatically enrolled in it, but the employee, as I mentioned earlier, can choose to opt out. So, again, it's a program that is flexible to employers and flexible to employees. Those who wish to participate can do so, but those who do not wish to do so do not have to.

Employee contributions to the PRPP would be made through automatic paycheque deductions. The employer would be required to deduct and remit the employee contributions to the administrator. Again, it's a relatively straightforward process; something that many employers are doing already and that employees are accustomed to

having done. It's seamless, and something that would be relatively easy to implement and easy for employees as well.

Individuals who do not participate in the workplace PRPP, such as self-employed individuals, for example, would be able to enrol themselves in a PRPP of their choice. In this case, an individual would contact the PRPP administrator to join a plan, and would make contributions, again, through an automatic payment plan with their financial institution, like so many of us do on a daily basis with our financial institutions, with our banks, to make payments and make savings contributions.

0920

Again, as someone who has been self-employed and who did look at savings options, I have to say that there were a limited number of savings options here. I'm excited about this piece of legislation because I know there are a lot of folks out there in Ontario who are self-employed; in fact, that number is growing. Offering this provides them with an option that is much needed to address some of the issues that Minister Sousa talked about in terms of addressing the retirement savings gap.

Each administrator would be responsible for designing its own PRPP. A plan administrator could choose to offer one or multiple PRPPs, depending on the marketing strategy and whether it sought to tailor its PRPP for specific employers. Administrators would have the option of including different investment options to reflect the varying risk profile of the people who are contributing, of its members. A default option would be applied to members who did not make a choice or an investment option within a specific time frame. Again, this is for ease of implementation and for the convenience of contributors.

In order to administer a PRPP, a corporation would be first required to obtain a licence to operate as a PRPP administrator. To do so, the corporation would need to satisfy conditions that will be set out in regulations; again, making sure that the highest standards are met in the administration of PRPPs.

Our government recognizes that increasing retirement savings in the province is a complex challenge that requires a multi-faceted approach. Establishing pooled registered pension plans is just one step in our plan which will encourage investment in voluntary retirement savings tools.

In the last few months I've had many conversations with people in my community who talked about the retirement savings gap, and many people acknowledge that retirement savings gap. In fact, I have a community with one of the largest percentages of seniors in the country. I meet with many seniors who have been the beneficiaries of savings plans or have put money away, but I also have met many seniors who struggle to make ends meet. This is one tool in the tool kit that we're introducing to make sure that the people who could be putting aside money today—people like myself—do so, so that when we are seniors we can provide for that quality of life that we enjoy today and that we deserve.

When I started speaking, I started by sharing the advice that I got from my constituent who talked about the

fact that I should be here to ensure that we're improving the quality of life of people today but also into the future. This bill, to me, is an important component of doing just that: of helping to secure the prosperity of Ontarians into the future. That's why I ask the members of this assembly to support this Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, 2014.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much for the opportunity to weigh in on this, Speaker. I'm actually quite pleased to hear this discussion on a PRPP, the pooled registered pension plan, as opposed to the ORPP, the Ontario registered pension plan, that the government has been touting all along. One of these is a red herring of sorts, and I can only imagine why they're trying to promote two conflicting pension plans at the same time. One would lead to speculate that the ORPP is nothing more than their continued battle with the federal government and it's some kind of a game that's being played with the taxpayers' and ratepayers' emotions. Sadly, that's all I can imagine that the whole Ontario registered pension plan program announcement is all about.

This PRPP, the pooled registered pension plan, is something that our members have been speaking about—Julia, if I knew your riding I would mention it.

Mrs. Julia Munro: York-Simcoe.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —that our member from York-Simcoe has been touting for quite some years now. I am very eager to hear the member speak very shortly for a very considerable amount of time to tell the public our party's interpretation of the pooled registered pension plan.

Again, I believe this conflicts quite drastically with the ORPP, the Ontario registered pension plan, and I'm looking forward to carrying on the debate.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: You know, Speaker, we tend to be confused here on this side of the House as well. You've got the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan that you brought forward; now you've got this one. There are so many options right now for pension plans. Constituents, people who invest in their retirement, need education and awareness. Throwing this into the mix is probably going to give people all kinds of choices, but the fact is, what are the benefits; what are the pros and cons to all this?

I talk to a lot of people with regard to contributions to financing for their retirement. It's a very confusing process. Bringing this into the whole equation—I would hope that, should this carry on and pass through the House, there's going to be some real education.

We have questions about how this arrangement is actually going to affect the banks and insurance companies, the management piece. Is that where it's going to? Is that the direction this particular pooled registered pension plan is going, and who that benefits, giving the banks and the insurance companies authority to do that?

So there are questions about this bill. We would like to know about the effectiveness of this bill and how it's actually going to translate into helping people with retirement pension plans.

The other thing, Speaker, is, the Minister of Finance talked about how very few people plan for their retirement, and there are many reasons for that. Some of them have precarious work; they have low-income jobs. There are also the bills of everyday life. I had a constituent, a senior, just recently contact our office. He was paying \$1,800 a month for a hydro bill. It's outrageous—and this is a senior trying to make ends meet. He planned for his retirement, but if we don't have affordability in everyday life, it doesn't matter how much we save; it's going to be taxing on everyone.

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

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Good morning, Speaker. I'm going to take a different slant on this pension plan. I have two girls who are 46 and 42. Neither of them has a pension through their work. They will not be able to access this pension, I don't believe—I hope that they will. I won't be around to find out. But as I went door to door, very clearly the seniors were concerned about their children and grandchildren, hoping that they would have a better pension to live on when they become seniors.

I believe that we are doing this for the children and grandchildren of the future. It's very important that we do this. People are living longer, and that's a good thing. However, they need more money to live, and I believe that this is the way to go. Many people do not have registered pension plans to contribute to anymore; there are fewer and fewer companies that offer them. Because my girls are hard-working Ontario citizens, I believe that people like them deserve to have a good retirement with a high quality of life. This goes also for my grandchildren.

When I grew up, I said I was going to be a teacher in grade 9; I became a teacher. There were three choices, when I was growing up, of what you could be, as a woman. Things have changed a lot. Kids now move from job to job, from career to career. They are much better at taking risks than my generation was. So I believe that there will be very few of them who will have pension plans where they work. The great idea is that these are transferrable, and I hope that we do get more from the CPP, but I am hoping that this is an answer for our seniors.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a pleasure to rise, and I'm glad to see this bill, which was proposed and first put on the table by our member from York-Simcoe, is being brought forward, because it is an important bill. It allows them to move ahead with the federal bill that's there and allows them to provide something—it allows employers and employees to opt in, and it's also portable, which is important as people move from job to job.

0930

I hear the talk too about some of their other plans. The registered plan—I think that's a foolhardy plan, because

it's a mandatory plan that really is on the backs of some of our small businesses that can't afford it. This is a much more opportune way of doing things.

Some of the red herrings I've heard: The RRSP room—if you look at it, there are many people who are very well set up for retirement who don't contribute fully to their RRSP because for tax implications it doesn't make sense. So the large number that's sitting there I think is a number that maybe misleads, really, the need for some of our pension plans, especially the registered retirement one.

Also, I too see our seniors and how they are concerned about their grandchildren and children, because they see the taxes and the payroll taxes, and the costs that have gone up under this government. What used to be a good pension just a few years ago no longer is enough to pay for your hydro bill, to pay for the increased cost of living in this province. That is the real concern. Are they going to have the money to pay off the debt of everybody who is born in this province? We're talking over \$20,000 of debt for every new child who enters the world, and under this government it will soon be \$30,000. That is something that you're going to have to have money for in retirement, to pay back part of this debt.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Etobicoke Centre has two minutes—the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the comments made by the member from Etobicoke Centre, the member from Nipissing, the member from London-Fanshawe, the member from Barrie and the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry as well.

Let's be clear: We are providing a supplementary plan. In the 2013 budget that was introduced, we de-linked the notion of having CPP enhancement alongside PRPPs, recognizing that we want to provide greater opportunity of choice and deliverable services for those companies that want lower-cost opportunities. Certainly, the PRPP is a much lower-cost delivery system that we want people to try to take advantage of.

We're working closely with other provinces and the federal government as well. In fact, some of the other provinces are starting to proceed further, as is Ontario, on this very issue, because it's critical for us to have some of the portability features that come from a PRPP to be able to be utilized. As a worker would migrate to and from various provinces, they would then be able to also transfer their PRPPs alongside.

The members opposite who claim that this is somehow in conflict or is diluting the challenge before us with respect to the savings challenge and the pressure that's going to be upon us in the years to come are putting their heads in the sand, Mr. Speaker. They're not looking forward, they're look behind. Because you've got to realize that the demographic changes that are ahead of us are going to be put under great pressures. The fact that there are unused programs right now—50% of Ontarians don't take advantage of, or are unable to take advantage of, a workplace pension. What we're offering is a supplement-

ary plan, yet another vehicle to enable them to have greater choice. That's what we're doing here today. I appreciate that all of us need to work together for the benefit of our young workers who are going to be most susceptible to this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to rise today and join in the debate on the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act. When I learned of the government's intention to pass this act, I had two reactions. My first reaction was that I was both surprised and pleased. I've been the critic for retirement security for some time, and have been advocating that Ontario allow PRPPs for some time as well. As a matter of fact, in April 2013 I introduced Bill 50, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, requiring the Minister of Finance to introduce a bill in the assembly to allow for pooled registered pension plans. Of course, in the budget of that year, in fact, that was indicated. So two years later and I'm getting my wish. I'm delighted; I'd actually like the Liberals to grant me a few more, but I'm very pleased to have this today for us to debate.

I think PRPPs are indeed good and necessary. Obviously, the federal government realized this some time back and passed the legislation that would allow the provinces to implement PRPPs, establishing the minimum standards that all federal PRPPs would have and that PRPP administrators must meet. Each province is responsible for enacting its own PRPP enabling legislation. Quebec has already launched its version of voluntary retirement savings plans. British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan have also passed legislation. So we're catching up here in doing this.

I'd like to thank the federal government for taking the lead on PRPPs and passing legislation allowing provinces to offer this new savings vehicle. If you look at the bill itself, you will see that much of it is related to hooking into the federal legislation in order to provide this new savings vehicle. I'd also like to thank our provincial government for recognizing the value in PRPPs and co-operating with the federal government on this issue. It is obviously something we all agree on how important it is that Canadians not only save for retirement, but also have a choice in how they are saving.

The federal Conservative government has been a leader when it comes to offering Canadians choice with their retirement savings. Not only have they introduced legislation for PRPPs, but also the tax-free savings accounts that have proven to be popular and useful savings vehicles. I applaud both governments on their foresight in allowing Canadians to save their money as they wish.

I think that it's really important in the world of acronyms to take a few moments to explain what the "pooling" refers to and what the "registered" is, because obviously "pension plan" is the other part of the acronym.

The notion of pooled is one that has gained greater and greater popularity and greater understanding and accept-

ance as people realize the complexity of making investments, and the fact that there are many places where the pension plans are, in fact, pooled. But they are pooled for that particular group that they are talking about or that are included. The pooling, then, reduces the cost. Obviously, if you are phoning or emailing or however you're communicating with a financial adviser on a one-on-one basis, that's going to be much more expensive than a company that is set up to accept the files, the accounts of hundreds of thousands of people. One press of a button has it all taken care of in a pooled setting. So the notion of pooled, I think, is something that people need to understand, and why it's to their advantage to do that.

The second is that it's registered. What does that mean? It means that your name is on a little pot of a growing amount of savings. While it's part of the pooled, there's your name on your savings, and I think that's extremely important.

The other principle that distinguishes this from government Bill 56 is that it's voluntary. I think it should be emphasized that this proposal is a voluntary undertaking by the employee and the employer. It's interesting—I'm going to digress for just a moment and come back to that—in Quebec, where I mentioned this has already taken place, nearly nine small business owners out of 10 favour the government phasing in voluntary retirement savings. We see that those who have gone before us have picked up a tremendous element of support.

0940

We regard PRPPs as an essential addition to retirement saving options. They are similar to a defined contribution plan; however, employer contributions, as was stated, are voluntary. A PRPP pools contributions together to achieve lower investment management and administration costs, and in that way you can see that the bigger the pool, the more efficient the administration can be and the lower the costs will be for that administration. It also means that as that pool is larger, it offers greater investment opportunities for the actual pooling. That is, again, a very important concept, because the smaller the group, the harder it is, first of all, to keep those costs of administration down and efficient, and it also means there is less opportunity for them to be in the marketplace of investment.

Probably two of the most valued demonstrations of that are with CPP, out on the world stage, able to take a significant amount of money. We're looking at—I've forgotten, but in the neighbourhood of \$150 billion. I don't think we're going to have that in a pooled registered pension plan, but the greater the pool, the greater the opportunity that can be made on behalf of the registered owners of that to be in that bigger investment market.

PRPPs, as others have explained, are a vehicle for both employers and the self-employed person. Self-employed people have always had a certain difficulty in establishing something that they could afford. The PRPP supplier takes responsibility for the employee relationship, and when an employee changes jobs, he can move

his PRPP to the new employer—assuming, of course, that the employer is a member of a pooled pension. But the withdrawals, then, are restricted until retirement.

A portable pension plan is a convenient pension plan. I think this is particularly important for the generations coming behind us. I remember when people looked at someone who was in the same business for his working life—and I say “his” because it likely was a him—as a feature of the dedication and the commitment and the loyalty that that person had to an employer. Today, people change jobs in two to five years; they move, on average, every five years. So we’re looking at an entirely different dynamic in terms of the users, the potential beneficiaries, of a pooled pension plan. It’s driven by the economics, by the technology, all the things that make people look for new opportunities and new challenges in their working life.

So the notion, then, that people are only going to stay in their job for a short time is the reality. It’s important for the younger generations to have access to a portable pension plan that is their own, rather than to be tied to a company pension. If a younger person has five to 10 jobs from the ages of 25 to 50, it doesn’t make sense to have a patchwork of pensions. Rather, it makes much more sense for that person to have a consistent PRPP that they can take with them to a new job. So I think it’s important to see the PRPP system as one that is easy for employers to offer and easy for employees who want to contribute.

People might ask, “Why not just encourage more savings in RRSPs or group RRSPs?” Pooled pensions offer a strong alternative to RRSPs. Economies of scale would make PRPPs considerably less to administer than is possible through the RRSP process, so there is going to be a fee advantage to offer in the PRPP. Large-scale investment is also possible with the pooled plans because of, as I mentioned a moment ago, the large pool of contributors.

I’ve personally spoken with representatives of Ontario’s financial industries and banks. They see PRPPs as an attractive product they want to offer. They know how difficult it is for people to be able to feel comfortable about saving, to understand what the choices are and to look at some of the obstacles that they may have.

I think one of the most difficult things for people is seeking advice. Where should they go? I can imagine that the viewers who provide advice say, “It’s me. I’m here.” Thankfully, many of them are there, and many people take advantage of their expertise. But I think that there’s still an apprehension on the part of many people that, “I don’t have a lot of money. I think only rich people go there. I wouldn’t know what questions to ask.” And those are the kinds of obstacles that are practical and real, and something like a PRPP would help to allay that concern. It comes back to the point I made at the very beginning: It’s voluntary and easily understood. Then they may embrace that and move on to a tax-free savings account or something else that they’ll find useful to them as well. PRPPs are designed to make saving easier and will certainly encourage people who aren’t doing so.

Business stakeholders have long hailed the PRPP as superior to standard pension plans because it’s voluntary for employers. If an employer should choose to contribute to an employee’s PRPP, their contributions are deducted as an expense. That means that they are not required to pay Canada Pension and other applicable payroll taxes on the contribution. So there’s a huge benefit to encourage people to provide this as a vehicle for their employees.

Unlike with a Registered Retirement Savings Plan, contributions to a PRPP also do not count as taxable income to the employee. In times of economic uncertainty, it is obvious that a PRPP can benefit both employees and business owners. It’s definitely a win-win situation. I know that many employers are looking forward to the opportunity to offer PRPPs to their employees.

Back in 2012, when this was first being generated by the federal government, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business surveyed their members. The survey found that 80% of small business owners do not have a retirement plan in place for themselves or their employees, but 34% would consider participating in a PRPP if it was available, and 30% were open to it as an option.

Clearly, with PRPP legislation actually in place, more people would have the opportunity to save for retirement. I think that my little digression into the nine out of 10 Quebec businesses who now see the benefits is a demonstration of how quickly it can be assumed there would be take-up on this.

As I mentioned at the beginning, Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act, is mandatory. This is voluntary, and I think it’s important to understand the difference. Many people, because of the public hearings going on on Bill 56, have introduced some concerns—many concerns, actually—on the Ontario pension. What they point out is that, frankly, Ontario families are struggling; so are Ontario businesses. They look at the kind of deficit that the government is carrying, they look at the cost of servicing the debt, which is almost as great as—I think the cost is the third most expensive item after health and education.

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The businesses and associations that I’ve spoken to have certainly expressed a great deal of concern over the details of the ORPP, and so I think we need to look at what some of those concerns are. It’s certainly not just my opinion, but the sentiments of Ontario’s small businesses and associations, including hundreds of local chambers of commerce across the province that have created a coalition to deal with this new proposed pension plan. Between red tape regulations and payroll taxes, the government seems to be on the lookout for ways to make running a business difficult in this province.

They are looking at energy costs and other initiatives that have deeply affected the way in which businesses are able to operate, if at all. The manufacturing sector is a perfect example of this, as many businesses are packing up and finding more affordable places to do business or introducing layoffs, including Caterpillar, Heinz, Stelco,

Kellogg's, Kraft, John Deere, GM, Hershey's, Siemens, Campbell's Soup, Sears, BlackBerry, Ford, General Mills and Unilever, just to name a few. When businesses are struggling, the government should be trying to create incentives for businesses to stay in Ontario and thrive. Instead, the Liberals continue to make it difficult to do business in Ontario.

In a statement from this past summer, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters said, "Manufacturers are facing tough economic times and rising energy costs which are hurting their ability to compete globally." Mr. Speaker, if the Liberals wanted to help our economy, they would make Ontario a more friendly place to do business. Instead, years of waste and mismanagement have forced upon both Ontario residents and their businesses increased costs, such as the global adjustment cost on energy bills. This surcharge is a result of over a decade of Liberal failures in our energy sector, including the microFIT program. Such projects have only increased costs for families and businesses and have done nothing to help Ontario's economy.

Charging more for energy when all our neighbours are becoming more competitive is the wrong direction and forces business to move outside Ontario. Soon we will be seeing a carbon tax, putting even more pressure on business. The ORPP will surely be yet another challenge for businesses by increasing costs, and businesses have been vocal about the danger of increasing costs eventually leading to decreasing the number of jobs. This is a danger Ontario can't afford. Our province already has half a million people out of work, and we risk seeing even more people on the sidelines not working and therefore not paying into a pension plan. The ORPP will be doing more harm than good. I want to emphasize this because of the fact that this is in contrast to the voluntary nature of Bill 57, the registered pooled pension.

The response to the ORPP from the CFIB includes the following:

The ORPP unfairly targets small business owners and their employees.

The 1.9% contribution rate for the employer and employee is far from modest and is actually a massive 40% increase to the current pension CPP payroll premiums that businesses pay.

As the ORPP premiums will be charged on income up to \$90,000, those earning between the current CPP limit of \$52,000 and \$90,000 will have a brand new tax that did not exist on that income before.

The ORPP will be administered by a new arm's-length agency. We've seen other agencies of this government, and they have severely eroded the trust of the general public and small business due to their lack of transparency and accountability.

The ORPP is expected to collect \$3.5 billion annually in contributions. The fact that many public sector pensions currently have billions of dollars in unfunded liabilities does not instill confidence in those who would be paying into the fund.

Employers will have to remit to the ORPP separately from CPP, and obviously this will create an enormous

increase in red tape. It severely undermines the government's ongoing efforts to be a leader in cutting red tape.

As the ORPP is a provincial plan, it will significantly undermine the competitiveness of Ontario's businesses.

In a 2014 policy submission, the CFIB explicitly supported PRPPs over the proposed Ontario pension: "CFIB is pleased that the province of Ontario is holding consultations on implementing a pooled registered pension plan since, from a small business perspective, a PRPP is a much more favourable option than mandatory increases in CPP premiums or mandatory contributions to a new Ontario pension plan. CFIB has publicly supported the ... PRPP as a voluntary, low-cost and administratively simple retirement mechanism. If properly designed, the PRPP has the potential of expanding pension coverage by attracting employers, employees and the self-employed, who currently do not offer or contribute to a pension plan."

Because the ORPP is being introduced at this time and employees will be forced to pay into this new mandatory pension plan, those who would like to contribute to PRPPs might not have the ability to do so. There's a certain amount of questions about the way in which one appears to be in competition with, as opposed to complementary to, the other. This creates a certain problem in terms of, as others have mentioned, the logic of offering two at the same time—one that is built on a voluntary principle and the other one built on a mandatory principle.

The question remains in terms of how one will impact on the other, but certainly the question of providing people with a voluntary system, an opportunity to make choices, is something that people value. Even when we look at the issues around what constitutes a complementary or a comparable plan to the Ontario registered plan, it demonstrates again that people want choice.

I think that the PRPP speaks to that motive of choice, of making responsible decisions and having the government provide the opportunity for people to extend their retirement savings in this regard.

According to my understanding, Bill 57 would be under the regulatory authority of FSCO. This is the provincial body that regulates the insurance sector, pension plans, loans and trust companies, credit unions, the mortgage brokering sector, co-operative corporations in Ontario, and service providers. That is the regulation or the government role with regard to PRPPs.

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With regard to the Ontario registered plan, they are talking about an arm's-length organization with no political interference, but I think that people have some skepticism about arm's-length experiences with this government. Certainly, when you think about eHealth and Ornge and the various other scandals and police investigations that are taking place, it's questionable in many minds about the value of these arm's-length organizations, particularly when they look back at the Ontario budget: "By ... encouraging more Ontarians to save through a proposed new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan,

new pools of capital would be available for Ontario-based projects such as building roads, bridges and new transit.” I think that is a clue as to what the government plans to do with your money.

I think it might be appropriate, then, at this point, to have a look at what happened in Quebec when it set about to do the same thing. It has shown that the result for the Quebec Pension Plan has been lower returns on investment, which, again, presents a potential problem here in Ontario. The result of lower returns on investment is an inevitable contribution rate hike. Currently, the Quebec Pension Plan requires a contribution rate higher than that of the CPP. More hikes will likely be coming as well due to funding shortfalls because of low returns on investment, again, because investments are benefiting the province rather than the retirees. If you look at the quote I gave from the budget, the Ontario pension plan is unabashedly being organized to provide new pools of capital, and this is what happened in Quebec. The *raison d’être* for Quebec’s pension is to make investments that satisfy the government’s priorities rather than maximize the rate of return for retirees.

If you look at the Canada pension, which the government is fond of comparing itself to, it exists for no other reason than the pensioners, and that is what pensions are for—they’re not for a tax-free opportunity to collect money from the pockets of the people of this province.

The *raison d’être* for Quebec’s pension is to make investments that satisfy the government’s priorities. The Caisse, Quebec’s pension fund manager, routinely partners with Quebec companies to take over foreign companies. In 2012, the Caisse invested \$1 billion in CGI, the world’s fifth-largest independent provider of computer, communications and information technology services to facilitate its purchase of UK-based tech provider Logica for \$2.8 billion. The Caisse also increased its stake in the Quebec engineering firm Genivar to help the company buy British-based WSP. Back in 2000, the QPP partnered with Quebecor and contributed over \$1 billion to take over Vidéotron.

It’s no coincidence that the Caisse invests heavily in Quebec companies yet has had to increase contribution rates to make up for low returns on investment. In 2008, it faced a shortfall of \$40 billion. In the 2011 Quebec budget, increased contribution rates were promised as a way to make up for this shortfall. According to the budget, the steady-state contribution rate—i.e., the rate needed to secure long-term financial stability—is currently at 11%. With the current contribution rate of 9.9%, the benefits paid by the plan will exceed contributions as of 2013.

In the short term, the plan will then have to draw on investment income and, as of 2023, tap its reserve to fund benefits for retirees. If there is no adjustment to the plan, the reserve will be depleted by 2039. It gives you a sense of the fact that when they go from their real job, a pension plan is for pensioners; it is not for make-work projects, infrastructure projects.

I would hope that this government would learn from that political experience in Quebec and recognize the

dangers of making it for political means rather than positive returns for retirees. However, it’s kind of questionable when you look at that quote I gave you from last year’s budget. So how can anyone say there is no link with an Ontario pension and transit infrastructure? The budget makes it quite clear that there is, in fact, a connection—a close one. Clearly, no lessons are being learned from Quebec’s past mistakes, and I think it’s really important to look at that instead of encouraging investment through vehicles such as the PRPP.

In the few minutes that I have left at this time, I want to draw your attention to the comparable, in a different jurisdiction, and this would be in the United Kingdom’s NEST. UK pension reforms were introduced in 2008 by the former Labour government which made it mandatory for employers to offer a workplace pension that both employers and employees contribute to. The National Employment Savings Trust, NEST, was established in 2010 as a national pension scheme open to any employer who wanted to use it to satisfy his workplace pension duty. Employers already using a qualifying pension scheme are not obligated to use NEST, but they are able to offer it to their employees alongside the existing scheme.

Since its inception in 2012, NEST has been growing. From 2013 to 2014, the number of employers offering NEST increased from 347 to 4,692. Membership increased from 80,000 individuals to over a million members, and assets under management increased from £3.8 million to £104 million. The opt-out rate stands at 9%. Those are the figures that this program offers in the UK.

NEST offers their members a variety of funds to suit investment and retirement needs. These funds include standard retirement date funds—which means if you look at where you are, your age, your decade, you have common goals with other people, generally, at that age, and that would be the kind of retirement option, then, that you would seek in looking at the range of investment needs—and other funds for people with personal beliefs or preferences about how their money should be managed. It once again goes back to the theme of “voluntary.” What would suit your particular pension needs?

The NEST pension scheme is run by NEST Corp. NEST Corp. decides how the scheme is run and how they invest contributions. NEST Corp. is accountable to Parliament through the Department for Work and Pensions, but it is not part of the government; they are run independently and work for pensioners. As they say, “We’re here to make money for you, not us.” What a great idea.

NEST invests in a variety of companies to get the best returns, many of which are located outside the United Kingdom. Some of the top 10 companies include Apple, ExxonMobil, Google, Microsoft, Royal Dutch Shell and Nestlé. Some 8.5% of the shares in NEST are UK companies, 17% are European, and nearly 55% are North American. NEST invests in the best interests of its pensioners. Sometimes, the best investments for a particular fund are found outside the province or country.

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Similarly, our own Canada Pension Plan invests heavily in foreign assets. According to a 2013 CBC report, “The fund behind Canada’s largest single-purpose pension was worth just over \$170 billion by the end of September 2012, up from some \$152 billion in 2011, partly on the strength of investments that include overseas real estate and infrastructure, according to the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board.”

NEST is not a perfect comparison to our made-in-Canada PRPP scheme, but there are many elements of NEST that I think we can look at and see that it provides a pretty solid comparison.

I think it’s important that NEST is portable. Employees can bring it from one workplace to another, and move within the UK, and still have access to their pension plan. Much in the way that this one is modelled, it would allow for people right across the country—so they can move and still have access to their pension plan.

Furthermore, NEST offers a diverse array of funds to suit the investor—again, I think this is contemplated with the PRPP model as well—so that investors have a choice in the type of funds they wish to invest in, which would make NEST an attractive savings tool for some people who might not already be saving.

Lastly, NEST invests in funds that best serve its pensioners, unlike the ORPP, which will be investing solely in our province and not diversifying investments. The first rule of thumb on saving is not to put all your eggs in one basket.

Portability and choice of investment would create an ideal scenario for Ontarians who wish to invest, who might not already be doing so. I believe that by making investing easy and portable, and by offering choice, NEST provides a good example of what Ontario’s PRPPs can do to encourage people to save for retirement.

Mr. Speaker, are we close?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You’re getting close.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Are we there?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): No, you’ve got three minutes.

Mrs. Julia Munro: As I mentioned earlier, businesses are very keen on offering PRPPs. I hope the government has noted, from the stakeholder consultations, some of the reservations and concerns that have been raised by business about the Ontario plan.

Going back to the original conversations with regard to the need for a pooled registered plan: In 2012, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce submitted a letter to then-Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, calling on the government to introduce legislation to implement PRPPs: “We hope you believe, as we do, that PRPPs will help strengthen the retirement income system in Ontario.”

Again in 2012, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business submitted a letter to Finance Minister Dwight Duncan, urging him “to move quickly to implement pooled registered pension plans in your province. We further ask you to avoid increasing Canada Pension Plan premiums at this time...”

PRPPs “address some of the problems with current pension tools by promoting lower fees and by shifting the administrative burden from employers to financial institutions. In addition to lower fees, employee plans will also benefit from the fact that, unlike contributions to employee RRSP plans, employer contributions” to pooled registered plans “will not attract additional payroll taxes like EI, CPP and WSIB premiums.”

A little more recently, this year the Ontario chamber and the Certified General Accountants of Ontario partnered to consult employers on pension reform. They found that employers are firmly in favour of PRPPs and are much less supportive of enhancing government-managed programs.

“I don’t think we need to, or should, mandate additional retirement saving, but I am in favour of the kind of universal coverage with opt-out choice that the Quebec version of PRPP provides.” That is a quote from Dean Connor, president and CEO of Sun Life.

Before I move on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I’d like to thank the member from York–Simcoe. We will continue debate when this issue is brought back to the floor.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

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

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Reza Moridi: It’s my pleasure, on behalf of Michael Coteau, MPP for Don Valley East, to welcome the family of Danielle Peters. Danielle is a student in Don Valley East and is the page captain today. She’s joined by her mother, Joy; her father, Derek; and her sister, Emily. Please join me in welcoming them.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a number of guests to introduce this morning. First, on behalf of the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North, our page captain today is Kari Peltonen. Accompanying us today is Kari’s mother, Marie. She will be in the members’ gallery this morning.

As well, a guest of my own: I would like the House to join me in welcoming Robert Gutwein, president of Hansa Haus German Canadian cultural club, making his visit in the east members’ gallery. Willkommen.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I’d like to welcome Anne Boucher, who is in the west members’ gallery. She’s here shadowing me, believe it or not, from the University of Toronto, but she’s also a resident of the city of Timmins. Welcome to Anne.

Mr. Granville Anderson: I would like to welcome Ian MacMillan and Madiha Ahmad from my constituency office. Welcome.

Miss Monique Taylor: I’m absolutely delighted to welcome a dear friend today, Mr. Bill McBain, who’s here with the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Welcome to Queen’s Park.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Our page from Thunder Bay—Superior North, Kari Peltonen, is one of the captains here today, so that's great. Joining Kari is her mother, Marie Peltonen. Marie, welcome. It's great to have you here. Let's welcome her.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's not an introduction, but today is Agnes Macphail's 125th birthday—the very first woman MP and one of the first woman MPPs. I just want to say: Happy birthday, Agnes Macphail.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's my privilege today to welcome the mother of our page Alycia Berg from Cambridge. Her mother is in the members' gallery: Bonnie Berg. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I would like to introduce Mr. Derek Burchell-Burger, who will be expanding his culture here in Ontario. He joins us from South Africa.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to introduce Natasha Pelletier, who is our page captain today—a page from my riding of St. Paul's. Her parents are here today watching question period: her mother, Luba Katic, and her father, Eric Pelletier.

Mr. Tim Hudak: None of us would be here without the hard work and the extraordinary dedication and leadership of our local riding association executives, so I'm proud to introduce six members of my team that are doing a Join Tim Hudak at Work Day today, suffering through that: Justin O'Donnell, Colin DeVries, Geri and Evert Ras, Wilma McNall and Boyd Haan. Folks, welcome to Queen's Park. Thanks for joining us today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to welcome the Heart and Stroke Foundation board members, volunteers and senior leadership who are here with us today at Queen's Park, including Michael Barrack, Ontario board chair; Navdeep Bains; Tom McAllister; and Mark Holland. They're with us today for Heart at the Park. Welcome.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I didn't bring my entire association to work today, but I do have a good friend and supporter, Stefan Wiesen, who has joined me at Queen's Park today. I'd like everyone to welcome him.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I would be remiss in not introducing her: She often hides herself in the office downstairs, and she has finally made it up here to the Legislature. I want to introduce my executive assistant, Claire Prashaw.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm delighted to welcome to Queen's Park today members of the Heart and Stroke Foundation staff: Colleen Hill, who is the manager of Heart Healthy Children and Youth in Ontario, and her colleague from Windsor Denise Smith, the health promotion specialist for southwestern Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Jeff Leal: In the east members' gallery today are members of the Ontario Waterpower Association, which is headquartered in the riding of Peterborough. President Paul Norris and colleagues are there. I would recommend that everybody take the opportunity to visit the reception from 5:30 to 7:30 in the legislative dining room

WEARING OF PINS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on a point of order.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that all members be permitted to wear pins in recognition of Heart and Stroke Foundation Day at Queen's Park, known as Heart at the Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is requesting unanimous consent to wear the ribbon for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Do we agree? Agreed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Minister, there has been much speculation, but few hard facts, about your selling off of Hydro One. It's very worrisome how secretive you have been throughout this process.

Hydro One is the property of the people of Ontario, and they have every right to know your party's schemes to sell their assets to dig you out of the fiscal mess that you and your Premier have created.

Your leader constantly talks about running an open and transparent government. Now is your chance to live up to her words. Minister, when do you intend to reveal to the people exactly what you plan to do with Hydro One?

I think the question implies something terrible about the timing. The reality is, Mr. Clark has been working on this now for 10 months. He has a team of very experienced, sensitive, responsible people who are looking at all of our assets to see how they can be repurposed so that we can fund the infrastructure and fund the projects that the members on the other side continually ask for.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier and other members of cabinet have made it very, very clear that decisions with respect to our assets and our repurposing of assets will likely be included in the next budget.

They stand up and ask for transit. They are asking for transit in all parts of the province, and now we're going to—

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Minister, Hydro One is paid for by the electricity consumers of this province. They are the ones who have built the asset. They are the ones who own it. The company's operations, employees and pensions have been paid for by the electricity ratepayers.

Minister, you have already socked it to the energy consumers, with them paying among the highest energy prices in North America. You have suggested that you plan to take any proceeds from the potential sale and invest it in infrastructure. How can you justify putting the

cost of infrastructure onto the hydro bills of the people of this province?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member that the directions and instructions that we have provided to those experts who are advising us is that the interests of the ratepayer shall be paramount. We believe there will be opportunities for significant mitigation of rates under a new structure that we would set up.

In addition to that, the members know that this is a regulated industry, that the Ontario Energy Board manages the rates in this province for gas and for electricity and that frequently requests for increased rates are rejected or they're lowered by the Ontario Energy Board.

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We have a strong advocate for the consumer in the Ontario Energy Board. Regardless of what happens, the Ontario Energy Board will continue to strongly represent the interests of the consumer.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: Minister, in 12 years you have never put the interests of the energy consumer first, not once. They don't trust your government on the energy file. They've seen their hydro bills more than triple since 2003. Disasters, scandals and fiascos are the legacy of your energy policy. The people are worried that because of your desperate need for cash, you will sell off Hydro One at far below market value.

Minister, will you commit to the people of Ontario today that before any deal is signed, you will put it in front of the Financial Accountability Officer and the Auditor General so that they can vet it to ensure that Ontarians are getting fair market value for the asset that they own?

Interjections.

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Wow, this is really rich, coming from that side of the House. I tell you, that's the party that messed up in the first place and left us with a legacy of stranded debt that is costing ratepayers to this day, Mr. Speaker.

What we're going to do, and what we've made very clear in the budget in 2014, is to do a full review of these assets, which are rightly owned by the people of Ontario. That is exactly who we're fighting for. That's why we're going to do everything we can.

I may also say that it's premature to make any responses, because decisions haven't been made specifically on the report that's being done right now, but the principles are guided by the fact that public interest must remain paramount and is protected; that decisions are in line with maximizing value for Ontarians; and that the decision process will remain transparent, professional and independently validated.

HOUSING SERVICES CORP.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Minister there's a

problem at the Housing Services Corp. that can't wait for your review or the passing of my private member's bill. The Housing Services Corp. is pushing housing providers to make tenant insurance mandatory and tenants are only being told about the HSC's tenant insurance. The insurance company, the broker and the general managing agency who are doing the work are getting paid, but tenants are also paying 5% to go back to HSC's pockets.

Do you approve of HSC getting a 5% kickback on insurance premiums paid by the people who can least afford it?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: What I understand is that the Housing Services Corp. is operating under the legislation that was passed by the party opposite when they were in government. The regulatory regime around that was spelled out by them, including the pooling and some of the financial aspects of that.

I've answered this question before. Very simply put, we're doing a review. We're doing a review because we put accountability measures in place that weren't there. We discovered there were some difficulties. I share the concern of the member opposite, and we're responding to fix the problem. It's as simple as that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Minister, this is taking advantage of people who are living in social housing, and it's happening today under your watch.

In Oxford, staff simply called the local insurance broker for a quote and got a lower rate than HSC's tenant insurance, probably because HSC insurance is inflated to pay them a 5% kickback. Under your watch, HSC is taking money from social housing tenants and spending it on trips to Europe, bottles of wine, lobster and questionable investments in Manchester, England.

Minister, will you contact the HSC today, ask them to stop the kickback, lower the prices and refund the money taken from tenants in the social housing units?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Let me just share some of the anecdotal comments that we've received from some of the municipalities that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew. And the member from Oxford: You asked the question; I'm sure you want to hear the answer. Thank you.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

"HSC works for us housing providers by leveraging our combined buying power in the private market, making sure we get the best deals"—Peel Housing Corp.

"Through the gas program, we've seen stable pricing and value-added programs tailored to our local needs. When it comes to insurance, they've helped to guide us through risk management by giving us a better understanding of where we might be vulnerable and how to manage the risk"—Windsor Essex Community Housing.

"I have been very impressed with HSC's work in bringing together"—

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

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Minister, your government is famous for trying to dodge responsibility. The Premier has been doing it for weeks on the Sudbury mess, delaying her meeting with the OPP and refusing to hold her staff accountable.

But your efforts to dodge the blame are hurting people in social housing. Minister, most of the problems in Housing Services Corp. started in 2007 and until now—long after your government was elected. Now you know that your review doesn't cover any of these problems. You're only doing a review for the last two years.

Minister, will you call in the auditor? Will you contact HSC today and ask them to stop the kickback, lower insurance and refund the money to tenants in social housing?

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think I heard a heckle that I'm not happy with, but I don't want to assign it to someone.

Minister?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I think the party opposite—the member opposite—insists on too strict a paradox: that we do well what they weren't prepared to do at all. The reality is—

Interjections.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: By the way, Mr. Speaker, it's a challenge that we could easily rise to, to do well what they didn't do at all.

In terms of dodging responsibility—we didn't do that. When I reviewed reports outlining some of the difficulties, I wrote to the board. They're now buying into cabinet and Treasury Board—

Interjections.

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

Finish, please.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: They're going to expense guidelines. There have been some changes at the board, and they have requested us to work with them to bring in a third-party evaluator. We're looking at what's broke and how to fix it.

While I share the concerns of the member opposite, we part on what the solution is.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Deputy Premier. Is the Deputy Premier under the impression that Ontarians want to actually have the Liberal government privatize Hydro One and their local hydro companies?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, what I can tell you is that the people of this province, right across this province, are very, very interested in seeing enhanced investments in transportation, in transit, in that much-needed infrastructure.

The notion that we have assets that we own, where we could get more value for those assets—to convert exist-

ing assets into new assets is something that I think has tremendous appeal for the people of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Liberals seem to think that we can't have both public hydro and public transit and transportation infrastructure. We can have both, but it will mean ending Liberal waste, incompetence and corruption.

What we can't do is be short-sighted about assets that put money in the bank and actually help us pay for infrastructure, year over year. Are the Liberals so short-sighted that they think selling off assets like Hydro One—that makes a profit, year in and year out, putting money into schools, into health care and into services—is a way to build for the future?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to say that we had an interesting opposition day motion debated yesterday in this House. It was a bit surprising that, I think, about half the NDP caucus was here to actually vote on that opposition day motion—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I listen carefully—I try. The member knows that we do not make any reference to attendance in this place, and I would want you not to do so.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I withdraw—

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —because it wasn't in reference to an individual.

However, what that motion—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A withdraw is a withdraw and only a withdraw.

1050

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I withdraw, Speaker.

I did want to point out that there were many, many factual errors in that motion. Let me give you a few examples of facts.

They said that we cut 6% out of nearly every ministry in the last budget. That simply is not true—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, let's cut through all the rhetoric here. Can the Deputy Premier tell Ontarians whether the Liberals are going to privatize Hydro One or the local hydro companies that people rely on to deliver electricity to their homes and businesses? Are they going to privatize them? That's the question.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our budget has laid out our path to balance. We have a very large deficit. We are getting to balance on that deficit. We have a number of strategies. We are looking at every program across government to make sure that we're getting the best value for each of those programs. We're managing compensation costs. We're ensuring that everyone pays their fair share of taxes by looking specifically at the underground economy. And we are determined to unlock the value of our provincial assets. As the finance minister has said, these are assets that are owned by the people of Ontario, and if

we can unlock the value to add more infrastructure, to add more transit, then that's the right thing to do.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Back to the Deputy Premier: Perhaps the Deputy Premier and Chair of Treasury Board should look at her own budget. On page 244 of the 2014 budget, the Deputy Premier will find a line that says ministries are going to be cut by 6% in 2014, in 2015, in 2016 and in 2017. That means that people will lose their jobs and services are going to be cut.

Can the Deputy Premier tell Ontarians how many more people are going to be fired as part of the 2015 budget and how many more services are going to be cut by Liberals as a result of the 2015 budget?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would refer the member opposite to actually look at the page of the budget that she has just referenced. What she will see is that overall spending is actually increasing. So to mislead—I'm sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You have to withdraw.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I withdraw.

To cherry-pick one line without looking at the big picture does not tell the whole story. But they've been wrong on other things as well.

They said that we're cutting health care. In fact, our budget in home and community care went up \$270 million on top of the \$260 million the year before. Overall, the health care budget is going up.

When it comes to education, they are saying we're cutting spending on education. That is simply not accurate. We're increasing spending on education.

They say we want to fire 100,000 people. They got that mixed up with the PC platform. We are continuing to build the services—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last December, the Auditor General said "the tangible costs" of P3s, "(such as those for construction, financing, legal services, engineering services and project management services) were estimated to be" over "\$8 billion higher" than they were estimated to be if the projects were managed by the public sector.

The Liberals insist that the well has run dry and that the only solution is slashing and privatization. But somehow the Premier can find \$8 billion that is totally wasted on P3s.

Are the Liberals going to keep firing nurses at the same time as they keep feathering the nests of well-connected construction companies?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: What anybody watching at home would be interested to know—if they actually looked at the robust nine-page platform of the NDP in the last election, they would see that their financial assumptions were the very same as ours, except, in addition, the member—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. We've got a two-way conversation going on behind the scenes here and I want it all to stop.

Please finish.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's get this straight: They ran on our numbers and then said they could do way better. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo said she could cut \$600 million more than we were planning. So I don't know where they're coming from. It seems to me that they are in a bit of disarray over there.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, two words: eight billion. Eight billion dollars that they're wasting every single time they put a P3 out there.

Look, nurses are being fired across Ontario, but when it comes to wasting billions on P3s, the chequebook comes out. Schools are being closed across the province, but when it comes to bankrolling billions in new corporate giveaways, the chequebook comes out. Public hydro companies are going on the auction block because the Premier says the cupboard is bare, but when Liberal waste and incompetence become a political headache, or a few Liberals see their jobs threatened, the chequebook comes out.

Will this Liberal government change their priorities, end the cuts, stop blowing billions on scandals and corporate giveaways, and pay attention to the people of this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'm encouraged by the question, only because I believe now that the member, the leader of the third party, may actually show up for lock-up at the next budget and actually get into the details that she's making reference to. Show up and we can—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's a cheap shot. We've got to do better in this place, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think there are a lot of people who should be doing a lot better.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And I don't need that kind of comment, either.

Please finish.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, had she read the budget and recognized that we are looking at a number of initiatives, including the assets, to maximize those returns so that we can reinvest into projects that matter and make us competitive—she should also note that the leader—

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

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'll do it in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, you won't. New question.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD

Mr. Randy Hillier: I guess the finance minister lost count.

Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Labour. Minister, yesterday I asked you whether you were aware of any slush funds being operated by the WSIB. Apparently neither you nor your Premier seemed to have any understanding of the fund in question.

Minister, an internal briefing note from the WSIB states that there was no oversight, as a direct result of political pressures. It also states that government policy on expenses was directly contravened as a result of those same political pressures.

Minister, given a direct connection between your Premier's chief of staff and the WSIB, can you explain to this House exactly what political pressures were applied to keep this slush fund operating, and by whom?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise in the House today, because certainly I think we're getting two very different opinions. I'd like to give you what I believe are the facts that the people of Ontario should know. That is, that the WSIB Grants and Research Program is delivered by the WSIB with funds that are collected from its employer premiums. It's a program that was brought into place in 1990. It funds several partner organizations, including the Ontario Federation of Labour. What they do is they provide help and training in claims management, specifically for workers to navigate the claims system to facilitate the return to work.

In 2012, shortly after some new leadership took over at the WSIB, an audit was conducted—a perfectly good business practice—to learn what changes could be made to enhance the system. Those changes have been put in place. As of 2016, everybody will be operating in a new manner.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Well, Speaker, let's go back to the facts. Here's the briefing note that we got from freedom of information, Minister; if you like, we'll send you a copy of it after.

My question is straightforward. The KPMG audit was in 2014. The briefing note says there was political pressure applied in multiple situations related to the operations of this slush fund. The KPMG audit found that this program is worthless and does nothing to prevent workplace accidents, and yet the best we can tell is that the Premier and Sid Ryan continue to scratch each other's backs with this taxpayer money.

Minister, exactly what political pressures are being applied to keep this million-dollar slush fund operating?

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Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: As I mentioned in my previous answer, this is a grant program that's managed by the WSIB. What it does is, it funds partner organizations to help injured workers return to work or train for new employment—perfectly good business practice.

An audit was conducted that covered the period from 2009 to 2012. They found there was a lot of good in the program. They found there were some areas where some improvements could be made. As a result of the work that was done by KPMG, that information was brought forward to the WSIB. It has made those changes and

informed its partners. We're in a transition year; those changes come into effect in 2016.

This is about making sure that injured workers in this province receive the help they need, return to work quickly and are treated in the manner they should be.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Can you tell me why you as the Deputy Premier, the Premier and other ministers of the crown won't answer any of the questions as to the Premier's role in the bribery of Andrew Olivier in the Sudbury by-election?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Before I call on the Deputy Premier, I'm going to just offer a caution. The language is starting to get really close to what I know you would realize is not parliamentary, so I ask you to be cautious, please.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Premier and others have spoken dozens of times on this very issue, Speaker. You know that we take this very, very seriously. You know that there is an investigation under way. You know that that investigation is being performed by people who actually have the skills and have the knowledge to conduct a fair and complete investigation. You know that the Premier is co-operating perfectly.

I do think it's important to read once again into the record what the Chief Electoral Officer said: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Speaker, the public has the right to know what it is the Premier did or did not do. In this House, members of the opposition have stood numerous times in order to ask very direct questions in regard to what happened within that whole fiasco in the Sudbury bribery scandal.

So I ask you again: Is the reason why the Premier is not answering any of these questions that she's afraid to answer those questions without having her lawyers beside her because she was the one giving the orders in order to do this?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we've used many examples of when others in the House are involved in an investigation and they say they cannot comment because there's an investigation going on. The NDP has done exactly that. In fact, our very own member from Timmins-James Bay has said, "You do have a larger responsibility to make sure you're careful in the use of your words so you don't interfere in any ... way."

The member opposite is right. Why he can say that and expect the Premier to do something different is beyond me.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Han Dong: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, I understand that on Monday evening,

you took part in the launch of Canada's first Chinese-currency—renminbi—trading hub. I heard a lot of good things about Shu Shan Min's remarks.

I also understand that this means that Toronto is the only jurisdiction in all of the Americas that will be able to clear Chinese currency. That's a big deal for importers, exporters and investors.

I know that the constituents in my riding of Trinity–Spadina are excited about our government's lead in making Ontario a global leader in investment and trade.

Minister, could you please tell us more about this fantastic opportunity for Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: It was a great pleasure to be at the RMB hub launch with the member for Trinity–Spadina as well as the Minister of International Trade, recognizing the union between Canada and the Chinese authorities.

Toronto, Ontario, now becomes the only financial centre in all of the Americas—North America and South America—to be able to do this currency trade, which will provide tremendous savings to businesses, make us competitive and enable Ontario and Canada to be more prominent in these activities. It's very good for Toronto, very good for Ontario and very good for British Columbia, whom we worked with closely over the last 18 months to make this happen.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of what happened a couple of days ago. It's going to improve relations with China.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for that answer. It sounds like the launch of the RMB hub is a huge economic opportunity not only for the province but also for the entire nation. It's clear that our government is committed to building Ontario up as a global leader and economic partner.

The Premier's recent trade mission to China underlines the importance of this economic relationship. To date, the mission has attracted nearly \$1.1 billion to Ontario in new deals and is creating nearly 1,900 jobs.

Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Finance please inform this House as to what future economic opportunities this RMB hub will facilitate?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member is absolutely correct: The work that he as well as the Minister of International Trade have done and the work that the Premier has done in her trade mission to China has enabled some of this to come to fruition. But I also give tremendous credit to the federal government and Minister of Finance federally, who took a lead on this, as well as Mike de Jong, the Minister of Finance for British Columbia.

In the end, the Canadian RMB trading hub will facilitate increased investment in trade, strengthen Canada's competitive position in global financial markets, build on our financial services and foreign exchange market expertise and infrastructure right here in Toronto, and strengthen Canada's broader economic relationship with China.

Congratulations to all who made this happen.

PUBLIC SECTOR COMPENSATION

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the President of the Treasury Board. Earlier today, it was revealed that the Ottawa Hospital had to eliminate another 35 full-time equivalents in health care. This is on top of cuts at the CHEO hospital in my city. We know that North Bay, for example, has lost close to 100 full-time equivalents in their health care.

These are the direct consequences of ignoring deficit reduction targets: cuts to health care and to education.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The minister can laugh all she wants, but the Fraser Institute reported this morning that ballooning public sector salaries have increased by a rate of 47% while inflation has only increased by 15%. Today, Ontario public servants are being paid 11% higher than those in the private sector.

My question is very simple: Can the Treasury Board president tell me how many additional job cuts we can expect in health care and education over the next few months as a result of ballooning salaries in the public sector?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This is an important question. We should all favourite this question because it is both a spending and a cutting question all in one.

You heard the member opposite say that she's concerned about cuts in health care. In fact, the Ottawa Hospital has had an increase in funding of 49% since 2003. That's over \$200 million more. Yes, it's true that the health care system is changing, and that does mean changing where people are working and the kind of care that is provided in hospital and out of hospital.

But we have a very clear path to balance, and we are on that path. It does involve restraining compensation. If the member opposite would actually look at that Fraser Institute report, she would see that, in fact, compensation has been flatlined for the past five years on an individual basis.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'll bring Pollyanna back to reality here: The Fraser Institute was pretty clear that public sector wages in Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I will not accept that. Either mention the person's title or their riding, please, and nothing else.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: The Treasury Board president isn't being clear with the assembly or the people of Ontario. We know that public sector wages are 11% higher than they are in the private sector. We know, for example, that those wages have increased 47% when inflation only rose by 15%. These are direct consequences when we see health care cuts and when we see education cuts. Each time a salary raises beyond the level of inflation, there will be compromises to public services that we value.

Will the Deputy Premier talk about the deficit that she has rung up with her colleagues, as she did earlier in question period, and about the fact that the increases to

public sector salaries are compromising health care services in the city of Ottawa and elsewhere in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I don't often quote the Fraser Institute, but if you would turn to page 9 of the report that was released today, you will see that compensation per provincial government job in 2009 was \$76,337. It is now down to \$75,960.

This is a chart that says that our plan is working, that compensation restraint is under way in the public sector in Ontario, and that's an important piece ongoing, as we get to balance.

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We are determined to get to balance by 2017-18. We're on the path to get there. It's not easy work, let me tell you, but it's important we do it at the same time as we protect the services that matter to the people of this province.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Energy. The Liberals have talked about selling off Hydro One. We've heard about breaking up Hydro One and selling it for parts. We've heard about plans for an IPO for Hydro One so that Bay Street can Hoover up the profits that we need for our hospitals and for our schools. We've heard about forced consolidation of local utilities. Of course, none of this came up during the election.

Can the minister please tell Ontarians what Liberals are planning for Hydro One?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I can tell the member that no final decisions have been made with respect to the asset council. They have neither been approved by Treasury Board or cabinet.

We have very, very competent people advising us on options that we can bring forward. We will bring forward options that will be in the best interests of the people of this province.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That would be new. That would be a change.

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

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: We have directed our experts to place the highest priority on protecting the interests of the ratepayer.

Most of all, since this Premier was elected Premier in February 2013, she's investing in people, she's investing in infrastructure and she's creating a dynamic business community.

I will speak to the issue more completely in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I think the minister is being overly modest. I think the Liberals clearly do have a plan for Hydro One, but apparently it's a secret. They didn't tell anyone during the last election, and they won't tell anyone now.

Can the minister end the suspense and tell Ontarians just what the plan is for Hydro One and local utilities across Ontario?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Mr. Speaker, I infer from the question that he does not support power in private hands. He has a member who is advocating that we continue to invest in private power; we've indicated that before.

But most importantly, the NDP claims to oppose the privatization of crown corporations, but Manitoba's NDP—their Balanced Budget, Fiscal Management and Taxpayer Accountability Act specifically contemplates the privatization of Manitoba Hydro, the Manitoba Public Insurance Corp., the liquor control commission and the Manitoba lotteries corporation.

Mr. Speaker, they have no plan. They haven't had any plan on a whole range of significant strategic issues. They should get to work and put forward something that they think might work, instead of simply criticizing.

TOBACCO CONTROL

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: My question is for the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, a recent national survey found that over four million Canadians still smoke tobacco. It was the lowest national smoking rate ever recorded, but statistically unchanged from the same survey two years ago.

Just this past Monday, we saw in the news that Montreal city councillors are putting great pressure on Quebec's government to tackle the prevalence of tobacco use in that province. Our government is working hard to toughen tobacco laws, ban smoking in public places, encourage more Ontarians to quit altogether and to protect our kids from ever taking up smoking.

Can the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to help bring down smoking rates in our province, and how we are protecting our youth from the dangers of tobacco?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I want to begin by thanking the member for that very important question. She's very right, Speaker: We are working very hard to reduce smoking in Ontario. I know we are working hard, and we have partners here, like the Heart and Stroke Foundation, who are very valued and who have been with us every step of the way.

I'm pleased to say that, partly as a result of our joint efforts, smoking rates have decreased in Ontario from 24.5% in 2000 to 18.1% in 2013. That's 332,000 fewer smokers.

But I know we also have to do more, and if we are going to reduce smoking rates in Ontario, we have to do two things: First, we have to ensure that that next generation of smokers never begins, and second, we have to help those who smoke now but want to quit. We need to help them. That is why we have invested over \$350 million for tobacco prevention, cessation and protection.

In my supplementary, I will speak more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Again, my question is for the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Speaker, in that same Statistics Canada survey, close to 700,000 current or former smokers who had tried e-cigarettes said they had used them to help quit smoking. At this time, I understand that the jury is still out in terms of the effectiveness of e-cigarettes to help people quit smoking, and there is also uncertainty as to their health impacts. As a consequence, Ontarians are concerned about the limited research to properly address these issues. Earlier this month, in fact, the federal Standing Committee on Health called upon the federal government to fund research into these very same questions.

Mr. Speaker, through you, could the minister please tell the House what our government is doing to learn more about e-cigarettes?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I thank the member for that supplementary question.

I believe that there is a role for government to protect people from what may be emerging harms. That is what electronic cigarettes are; it's an emerging technology.

There is currently no regulation at all in Ontario around electronic cigarettes. What this means is that a 16-year-old could walk into a store and buy an electronic cigarette. That is why Ontario is being the leader. What we have proposed is legislation that, if passed, would, among other things, ban the sale and supply of electronic cigarettes to youth under the age of 19 and restrict vaping in designated public areas. With this legislation, Speaker, we are trying to balance the potential benefits that might be there of electronic cigarettes in helping adults quit cigarettes, but on the other hand also making sure that that next generation never begins to take up electronic cigarettes.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Minister, Kawartha Downs is a vital asset to the horse racing communities in both of our ridings. Last year, after only being approved for 18 racing dates in a last-minute deal, as opposed to the traditional 90 to 100, Kawartha Downs went on to host a very successful season, with attendance and wagering second only to Woodbine Racetrack across the province.

Sadly, despite all this success, Kawartha Downs saw no reward and were denied their request for additional race dates this season. They also still have no commitment from this government on a long-term deal.

Minister, will you make a commitment today to Kawartha Downs and finalize a long-term transfer payment agreement for this track?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I appreciate the question from the member from Kawartha Lakes–Haliburton–Brock.

A number of years ago we appointed three very competent individuals, the honourable Elmer Buchanan; the honourable John Snobelen, who had a very distinguished career on those benches; and the honourable John Wilkinson, who put together a framework, a plan, that was indeed put in place.

In fact, I go to Kawartha Downs. I was there on four or five occasions to see the excellent work that was being done by Skip Ambrose at Kawartha Downs and the horse racing industry right across the province of Ontario.

In fact, just recently, Sue Leslie extended compliments on what we're doing for the horse racing industry. We know it's important to rural Ontario, and we're going to move the horse racing industry forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, I do hope you move the horse racing industry forward, because you put it back a hundred steps.

That doesn't explain why Kawartha Downs is the only track in the province without a five-year deal. You know that these long-term deals are vital to the horse racing community so stock can be purchased and maintained.

Kawartha Downs has one of the smallest purse pools across the province, and no announcement has been made by your ministry if they will receive their requested increase. If they remain at 18 race dates and a \$35,000 purse per night, it will slowly lead to the death of horse racing in our area and across eastern Ontario.

Minister, you're the one responsible. Will you commit to horse racing in our area and help assist Kawartha Downs by increasing their purse pools and committing to a long-term transfer agreement?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, we see the horse racing industry is very important to rural Ontario. We had three very distinguished individuals—Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Snobelen and Mr. Wilkinson—put together the five-year plan for horse racing in the province of Ontario. We're hearing very positive comments coming back.

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My colleague the finance minister has been working with us. Previous Minister of Agriculture the Honourable Ted McMeekin and the Premier herself have made a commitment to horse racing in the province of Ontario, to make sure it drives our rural economy.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you a story. Two years ago, when they thought Kawartha Downs was going to close, that member was there, and the former member from Northumberland–Quinte West was there. They were there because they wanted to put the curtains over Kawartha Downs. I was there to make sure Kawartha Downs was going to—

Interjections.

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

New question.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. We learned yesterday that instead of doing proper planning for the Pan Am Games, the government is asking Ontarians, in what could be called a faith-based transportation plan, to stay off the roads, miraculously reducing congestion by 20%.

Instead, we learned that they've done absolutely no modelling for how the Pan Am and Parapan Games will

impact city streets. Even if we trust the projections for the highways, every journey starts and ends on municipal streets.

Did they simply forget to do the breakdown and research on this, or did they not do it because they didn't want to hear complaints from the public?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member for that question. Yesterday, I did have the opportunity to update the public with respect to our transportation strategy for the upcoming Pan Am/Parapan Am Games. We have a very strong plan that draws on the expertise brought to us by individuals responsible for the successful transportation plans that were used, for example, at the Vancouver Olympics and the London Olympics. Both communities were able to meet or exceed their reduction targets, the targets of 20% that we've also identified in our plan.

In addition to that, we've created a games route network that calls for HOV lanes that will be operating throughout that network. We did announce some of the details relating to the modelling itself, Speaker.

But on the question about municipal streets in particular, it's important to recognize that our team at MTO and the rest of the TO2015 team have worked really closely with all 30 partners we have across the entire affected region, which would include the municipalities that will be participating. Those municipalities are well aware of the impacts that will occur on their streets, and they're planning for that impact.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The transit systems in Toronto and the GTHA are bursting at capacity now, and the government's plan is to shift tens of thousands of commuters and a quarter of a million visitors on to that system. Minister, where are they all going to fit?

They are spending \$7 million on enhanced transit service for the biggest sporting event that Canada has ever seen. Unfortunately London, England, invested £7 billion in transport systems for the Olympics—quite a contrast. We don't have backups in our network, and we don't have a plan B. What will happen if we have another subway breakdown like we had yesterday? How many hours will be added to people's commute?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: As I said in my opening response, we are working closely with all 30 of our partners across the affected region. We have a strong strategy in place, and we will achieve our targets.

I think what's most important, which the member opposite didn't recognize, is that currently in the GTHA, we have over \$16 billion worth of transit that's under construction. We'll be delivering the Union Pearson Express in advance of the games themselves.

Speaker, I would also note that it's interesting that this question is coming from a member representing Hamilton because if that member had showed up to yesterday's technical briefing, he would have known that the James Street North GO station that we are currently building will be in service in Hamilton for the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games.

Interjections.

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

New question.

FARM SAFETY

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Food. My riding of Halton is home to a diverse and active farming industry. Take a drive along any side road in Halton, and you will see farms, orchards and livestock operations in the region—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, come to order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I asked the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek to come to order.

Mr. Paul Miller: Unbelievable. No class.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is warned.

Carry on. Finish your question, please.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: This includes a large variety of farming types.

We all know that workplace safety is vital. No one wants to have a loved one head off to work and come back home injured or not at all. However, most of us don't usually think about farms and farming practices when it comes to workplace safety.

In Ontario, we have close to 50,000 farms and 75,000 farm operators working daily. It's important to ensure their safety. That's why the Canadian Federation of Agriculture established this week as Canadian Agricultural Safety Week.

I know this government is committed to ensuring that farmers, like the ones in Halton, are safe—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank my colleague from Halton for the question. I know how she works tirelessly on behalf of the agriculture sector in that great area of Halton.

We do know our government is committed to providing safe working environments for farms right across the province of Ontario. If members had been in the House yesterday, the member from Haldimand–Norfolk shared an example of a personal friend of his who experienced a very devastating farm accident that had long-term implications for that particular family.

Our ministry has been working hard with Workplace Safety and Prevention Services for over 15 years to improve farm safety. Canadian Agricultural Safety Week gives us the opportunity to emphasize that working on safety programs on farms is a top priority for all of us.

We can accomplish this through three ways: through the Ontario FarmSafe network; the agricultural safety days, which focus on safety education and training for children and families, with a goal of reducing child injuries, which have occurred in our agriculture sector; and

through Growing Forward 2, we also fund a number of initiatives, for farmers right across Ontario, that promote farm safety.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you to the Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Speaker, farmers are an important part of our economy, but the work they do is often hazardous. Just recently, the Guelph Mercury said, "Farmers are five times more likely to be killed or suffer work-related disability than those in any other occupation."

Many of the people in my riding work in the agricultural sector and face these inherent risks each day. Sargent Farms, for example, is a family-owned and -operated poultry processing business that has operated in Ontario for more than 65 years. This business and hundreds of other high-quality farms are pillars of our local economy.

I understand that in 2006, our government extended the Occupational Health and Safety Act to include farming operations for the first time.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you tell my constituents what else our government is doing to protect the health and safety of Ontarians who work in our agricultural sector?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'm really pleased to be able to take such a timely question from the member from Halton, who is my neighbour in Oakville.

The Ministry of Labour has over 200 trained inspectors. They have got expertise on issues that are very inherent to the health and safety of Ontario's workers, including those who work in the agricultural sector.

What we do at the ministry is we conduct both proactive and reactive visits to farms right across this province, to ensure that the best practices are met and to actually charge those who are not performing safe work. To address and continuously improve farm safety in Ontario, we work with the farming Technical Advisory Committee.

Speaker, the Ministry of Labour continues to make great progress. We've still got more to do, but we want to ensure that Ontario farms are safe places to work.

HOSPICE CARE

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, in her most recent report, the Auditor General pointed out that the hospice sector in Ontario is providing high-quality care, but then she went on to describe a patchwork approach across the province.

During the election campaign, your government committed to fund 20 new hospices. You reaffirmed that commitment in last year's budget. Matthews House Hospice, in my riding, is one example that does not receive operational funding.

Minister, you're about to release a new budget while you have yet to fulfil your commitments in the last budget. People cannot put off dying to wait for your govern-

ment to do the right thing and provide compassionate, cost-effective care. When are you going to take some pressure off our local hospitals and properly support hospice care?

1130

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I commend the acting leader of the official opposition. I know he is a very strong supporter of palliative care and the valuable work that our hospices do. I know he's going to want to join me, because we so infrequently do this: to celebrate and acknowledge and thank the many, many health care professionals and other professionals, as well as the communities and individuals, that support our hospices and work in palliative care. They do important work across this province every single day.

We have made a commitment to fund the operating costs of 20 new hospices. We're already providing that support to over 30 hospices in the province, and I'm happy to say as well that my parliamentary assistant, John Fraser, has taken upon himself the extraordinarily challenging exercise to develop a palliative care strategy for the entire province and to take upon himself as well the responsibility of focusing on the hospices in those additional 20.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the minister: There are 12,000 people in this province dying in hospital each year because there aren't enough hospice beds. The Auditor General points out that hospice care is much cheaper than hospital care. As an example, in the first six months of last year, Matthews House in my riding cared for 64 people at a cost of \$254,000, all of that money raised by the community. Comparable care in hospital would have cost \$608,000. In other words, Minister, as you know, care in a residential hospice is less than half the cost of hospital care.

Your party platform promised more end-of-life care and, specifically, as you mentioned, the funding of 20 more hospices. It has been 10 months, Minister. I know your heart is in the right place, but there are people dying unnecessarily where they don't want to die, and that's in hospital. They'd rather be in a hospice or at home. Would you do the right thing and live up to your commitments?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, that's why we've made this commitment: because we do value the work that hospices are doing. I don't think the Speaker will mind me referencing a hospice in his riding, actually, Stedman Community Hospice, that I visited before the New Year, which is providing extraordinary service not only within the hospice itself but within the community through its outreach programs. We have made this commitment. The member opposite, as a former Minister of Health, will also know that we were the first government—this government, the Liberal government—to actually provide funding to hospices in Ontario. The former Minister of Health will also note that we were the first government in Ontario to provide an end-of-life strategy in this province.

We're going a step further. We're developing a palliative care strategy so that the care provided is uniform

across the province. Part of that strategy is to fund an additional 20 hospices, their operating costs, as we've committed to do.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Health. This morning, patients in London were shocked to learn that elective surgeries have been cut by two thirds for two weeks in a row. That means that dozens of surgeries won't be done. Anyone with a loved one waiting for surgery will be outraged by more delays. Everyone in London has one simple question: Will the minister stop these cuts or will he stand by while patients suffer?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you for the question. I appreciate it.

The member opposite knows that we aren't cutting health care spending. In fact, the percentage of government funding that goes into health care has increased year over year as long as we've been in power, and that will continue going forward.

Hospitals are independent entities. They work closely with the LHINs, the local health integration networks, within their localities. They make decisions based on not only the financial realities, the budgets that they've been provided with by the ministry, but also from time to time there are changes that happen. I don't know the specifics in terms of the current situation in London, but I certainly will be looking into that.

Our funding for hospitals, Mr. Speaker, over the past decade has on average increased by 50%. We are making significant investments in our hospital environments, but the funding has increased by 50% over the past decade.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. Despite what the minister says, this reduction in elective surgeries in London is just the latest in the growing list of Liberal cuts to London's hospitals: 52,000 nursing hours cut, 80,000 cleaning hours cut, \$37 million cut. Front-line nurses say these cuts are having "a horrendous effect" on patients. How can the Minister of Health stand by and allow patient care to deteriorate in this way in London?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I don't allow that, and I have an expectation of all our hospitals that they maintain the highest quality of care and services that they're required to do. I know also that they work closely with their LHINs, with their local health integration networks, to do that. That's an expectation that I have. Certainly, as I mentioned, with the funding increasing year over year—not only the global health care budget, but the funding that we're providing to hospitals has increased by 50% over the past decade—our hospitals are doing incredible work.

We're measuring the outcomes. We're measuring the quality of services that they're providing. They are working to find efficiencies, provide innovations, and develop and change programs so that they're able to provide even better care. I know they work in concert with their local

communities, the patients they serve and the boards that govern them, but certainly with the LHINs, as well, that have the responsibility for patient care and quality of care.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Mr. Yvan Baker: Speaker, most of the time when I've risen in the House to ask questions, I've asked questions about issues that are of specific interest to my community in Etobicoke Centre, but today I want to ask about something that's of concern to all our communities. It speaks to what the government is doing to ensure our fiscal sustainability while also providing important services to Ontarians.

My question this morning is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Minister, when our government made the decision last April to keep the motor coach, Polar Bear Express, rail freight and refurbishment business lines of the ONTC in public hands, we committed to transforming the ONTC to ensure that it was financially sustainable and a strong transportation network for the people of northeastern Ontario.

Minister, the ONTC has recently been in the news around this transformation. This transformation is of course critical to these commitments. Could you update us on the status of the transformation?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks to the member for Etobicoke Centre. It's really a great question. Our government is absolutely committed to transforming the ONTC.

Less than a year ago, Mr. Speaker, I was up in North Bay announcing that, indeed, we will be keeping four of the five important lines of the Ontario Northland in public hands. At that point, we also made announcements related to strategic investments to ensure that the ONTC continues to support economic growth in northeastern Ontario.

And just during this past month, we have appointed a new board, a new commission of members from northeastern Ontario who are bringing experience in financial management, accounting, organizational restructuring and governance. We're very pleased to have them.

I am particularly pleased, may I say—and I think other members of the House are as well—that Tom Laughren, the former mayor of Timmins, has agreed to serve in the role of chair of the commission. His knowledge and passion for northern Ontario are going to make a real difference. We're excited about his involvement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Minister. I expect that this new board will bring the strong leadership and skills required to make sure that the transformation is successful.

Minister, given the nature of the ONTC's business, I imagine that labour is an important part of this transformation. I know that there is ongoing collective bargaining between the ONTC and its unions. There has recently been news regarding these negotiations, and I'm wondering if you could update the House on the status of the ONTC's labour negotiations.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you again to the member from Etobicoke Centre for that question. Certainly it's an important one, because there's no question that from the very beginning of our discussions related to how we were going to transform the ONTC, it's been understood by all parties that labour is certainly a critical component of transforming the ONTC to a truly long-term, sustainable organization and continuing to support our very strong commitment to public ownership.

What we're very happy about is that the ONTC and the United Steelworkers have recently reached an agreement. The ratification of a new five-year collective agreement passed this past Friday, with 88% of the USW members voting in favour of the deal. Obviously that's very good news, so I am very much commending the efforts of ONTC management and the USW in working together to negotiate an agreement that balances the business needs of the ONTC, the interests of employees, and the need to provide sustainable and affordable public services.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Oxford has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing concerning the HSC's tenant insurance program. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m. today.

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

The House recessed from 1140 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I would like to recognize, in the members' gallery today, a great friend of the people of Nepean-Carleton and Carleton-Mississippi Mills, the wonderful assistant to MPP Jack MacLaren of Carleton-Mississippi Mills, Brad McNulty. He's an expert at multimedia, an all-around great guy. He's here joining us today from the great city of Ottawa.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Next member's statement? Introduction of guests.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I want to introduce Chris Yaccato in the members' gallery today—probably well-known to yourself—here on behalf of the Ontario Lung Association. Welcome, Chris.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Who is he? Introduction of guests. Introduction of guests? Last call for introduction of guests. It is now time for members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

KEN ROSS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Ken mail: That was referring, this past Friday in a eulogy for my friend Ken Ross, to

little emails he would send to his friends and other community leaders sometimes to give them a boost, make them laugh or give them some support.

Each time we would deal with a provincial budget, I would receive Ken mail with advice for the provincial government on how to pursue its budget and also just a little nugget of inspiration for me to keep going, and I appreciated that. I miss Ken a lot, as I know many other community leaders do. He died at the age of 54 from cancer and complications with respect to pneumonia.

But I want to say this: Not only was he a long-time friend of mine and to so many people in the community, he was a businessman. He owned Ross' Independent. He chaired the BIA. He was a member of the chamber of commerce.

As a grocer, he decided he wanted to give back to all the people in the community and became a wonderful philanthropist. In fact, in the first five years of his business he donated almost \$500,000 back to the community. By this year, it had been up to \$700,000.

He chaired the food bank to make sure that people who were less fortunate would have some food in their tummy, especially for their kids at school.

Ken was a legionnaire. He was with the Order of St. George. He was a Lion. He contributed to Canada Day. He contributed to Oktoberfest. Ken was the type of guy who makes us who we are in this assembly.

When he died last week, it really rocked our community. Young athletes who he had supported, like Kayla Maduk; the autistic community, who he had supported; and those within the Barrhaven Legion were also crushed.

I want to say this before I end: Barrhaven's community lost a great leader, and the Legion, just yesterday, decided to provide \$5,000 to the food bank in Ken's memory. For that, I am grateful.

To Kelly Ross, Ken's wife, and to his four children, my thoughts are with you. Ken's legacy will forever live. Thank you.

YOUTH SERVICES

Miss Monique Taylor: During the break last week, I took the opportunity to visit some homes operated by the Good Shepherd that serve Hamilton youth.

Angela's Place provides transitional housing apartments to young moms under 21 and babies can stay for up to two years, where they're supported with healthy lifestyle skills, education and child care.

Brennan House is a 15-bed transitional house committed to youths aged 16 to 20, keeping them off the streets. They learn life skills and are provided support and tools to deal with mental health issues, abuse and neglect.

Jeb's Place provides a residential environment for youth with supporting families the tools and supports when dealing with mental health issues, trauma and conflict resolution.

Notre Dame House is Hamilton's only shelter for homeless and street-involved youth. In addition to providing beds for 20 youth, they have on-site access to mental health professionals, a physician and a nurse practitioner. Youth support workers are there to help the youth find their way. Their drop-in meal program provides thousands upon thousands of meals every year.

The staff in these facilities do a fantastic job with budgets that are severely underfunded. Government funding amounts to about \$44 per day per bed, but with ongoing fundraising and their selfless dedication, they make it go so much farther. While this government promises tax cuts to the largest corporations, these dedicated workers give their heart and soul for the children they care deeply about.

AUSTIN RILEY

Mr. Granville Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell you and the members of this House about a young man named Austin Riley, from the wonderful city of Uxbridge in my riding. Austin and his family are taking it upon themselves to embark on a tour across North America where Austin will take his go-kart to race against others from Florida to Texas to California, and in BC, Manitoba and Alberta.

Earlier this week, the students of Uxbridge Secondary School gave Austin a resounding round of applause to help launch his tour. They signed banners of support, got to see Austin's go-kart, and even got his autograph.

This is an exciting feat, Mr. Speaker. What makes it even more poignant, though, is that Austin races with autism. He and his family will be spending their tour talking to young people in schools throughout North America about the challenges faced by individuals and families with autism, but also about how hard work and opportunity can go a long way.

I wish Austin and his family a safe and happy trip. I hope you will follow along with Austin's journey on Twitter at @racingautism.

I am proud that people from my riding take it upon themselves to spread compassion and awareness, and I wish them the very best of luck on their way.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaker, last month I rose in the House to speak about the two wind farm projects being proposed for Merrick and Mattawan townships in my riding of Nipissing. I'm pleased to inform this Legislature that because of the hard work of the local First Nations, Chief Davie Joannis and Chief Clifford Bastien, the five Mattawa-area mayors and many stakeholders, the Mattawan wind farm proposal has been cancelled.

While this is cause for celebration, concerns remain for the wind farm proposed for Merrick township, just north of North Bay. Last night, I held a town hall in my riding on the cost of wind power in Ontario and had over

100 people turn out. They turned out from across the region and spoke about their concerns with industrial wind turbines. Many commented on how wind power has caused their hydro bills to skyrocket, claims that were backed up by the Auditors General in 2011 and 2014 reports. I have resolutions sent to me from the townships of Chisholm, Papineau-Cameron and several others, all voicing their concerns about the proposed wind turbine installation.

This social engineering program has failed, and it's time Ontario changed its course.

GRAIN FARMERS OF ONTARIO

Mr. John Vanthof: Yesterday, I had the opportunity to attend the annual "March classic" meeting held by the Grain Farmers of Ontario in London. It's a combination trade show and business symposium attended by farmers and agribusiness people from across the province and country. It was great to spend some time with my neighbours from back home in District 15, a little place called northern Ontario.

The delegates took the opportunity to thank Henry Van Ankum for his contribution as chair of GFO for the last three years. I would like to echo that sentiment. It's been a privilege to work with Henry and his colleagues on issues impacting the grain industry, and I look forward to continuing to work with the current chair, Mark Brock, as well.

As always, the organizers of the March classic had a very engaging list of speakers, but this year the talk in the halls was not about the speakers or crop prices or even the weather. Producers were talking about the recently posted regulations restricting the use of neonicotinoid seed treatments. Many farmers felt somewhat under fire in the whole neonic debate. They realize the importance of protecting pollinators, and when it was identified as the dust of planting equipment, they acted quickly to control the problem. The Grain Farmers of Ontario continue to work with other stakeholders towards a solution, including proposing increased areas for pollinator-friendly plants.

The government has stated that their goal is to have the strongest regulations in North America. Their goal should be to have the most effective program to protect pollinators and farmers.

1510

FOODSHARE

Mrs. Cristina Martins: On March 12, I had the pleasure to attend the eighth annual Great Big Crunch. This event, hosted by the local Davenport-based organization FoodShare, promotes healthy eating by inviting schools, communities, daycares and workplaces across the province to take a giant synchronized crunch into a locally grown Ontario apple. Nearly 170,000 people from across the province took part in this great event and

enjoyed delicious apples supplied by the Norfolk Fruit Growers' Association.

FoodShare is a fantastic organization in my riding of Davenport which for 30 years has had its doors open to increase access to healthy food and food education in our province. I'd like to personally thank executive director Debbie Field for all of her work on this very important cause.

Joining us at FoodShare that afternoon were grade 2 and 3 students from Brock Junior Public School. These students not only enjoyed some delicious Ontario produce but also participated in many hands-on food literacy activities and learned the importance of making healthy eating choices. It is truly very important for every one of us to make healthy eating choices in order to lead better and more fulfilling lives.

I'm proud to say that our government certainly understands the importance of FoodShare's services. Recently, FoodShare received an Ontario Trillium fund grant to support their new initiative to develop an urban agriculture and community-building model focused on collective planting.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy that I could attend this wonderful event, and look forward to working together with FoodShare in the future.

ALMONTE GENERAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Jack MacLaren: The Almonte General Hospital is suffering from a five-year budget freeze by the Liberal government. The hospital has done an excellent job of reducing costs, but it is not enough. This spring, they had to lay off 11 registered practical nurses.

I would like to invite all front-line health care workers, and those who support them, to join CUPE leaders Linda Melbrew and Michael Hurley with myself in front of my constituency office at high noon on Friday, March 27. We will tell the story of how this wasteful and big-spending Liberal government has cost our registered practical nurses their jobs and sacrificed the quality of health care at the Almonte General Hospital.

What a loss. What a shame.

SANCTUARY REFUGEE HEALTH CENTRE

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Over the March break, while visiting people and groups in my riding of Kitchener Centre, I had the privilege of meeting with Dr. Margaret Brockett and Dr. Michael Stephenson, who are directors of the Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre. The region of Waterloo has become a hub for new Canadians, including refugees. The Sanctuary clinic was founded in 2013 in response to this growing population.

The clinic serves some of the most vulnerable newcomers. Many of these people were forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence and persecution. When they arrive, they often have unique and complex health needs that require an integrated approach to care,

including psychological, economic and settlement help. Thanks in part to a grant that they received in 2014 from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the clinic has been able to hire a registered nurse and a social worker to offer public health and counselling services on-site.

At the Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre, no one is turned away. As a result, many patients are diverted from emergency rooms and walk-in clinics. Mr. Speaker, this is saving us money.

No one chooses to be a refugee, but as Ontarians we can choose what our response will be to our neighbours in need. I'm proud to tell you that the Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre is doing just that, and I thank them for their efforts every day.

FRANKLIN HORNER COMMUNITY CENTRE

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I am pleased to rise in the House this afternoon to speak about an event that I attended just a few hours ago in my riding: the annual Franklin Horner Community Centre's Seniors Health Fair.

I'm fortunate to have many facilities in my riding that serve the seniors of my community. One of these facilities is the Franklin Horner Community Centre. They have served the residents of Etobicoke for over 20 years as a non-profit charitable organization, and they have dedicated themselves to improving the lives of seniors throughout Etobicoke.

This community centre provides a range of programs, from dancing to bingo, socials, computer classes, fitness classes, and seniors' lunch-and-learn programs. The organization boasts over 1,200 members and 52 different subgroups that have programming there.

I'm particularly proud of their vibrant seniors' club and was fortunate to attend their health fair today. At the health fair, they featured a trade show, vendors, food and door prizes, but most significantly, a presentation about elder abuse and financial abuse of seniors. I was delighted to observe the well-received presence of Elder Abuse Ontario focusing their efforts on educating our local seniors with regard to bullying and financial fitness, as well as how they can protect themselves against fraud and scams.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Forster assumes ballot item 45 and Ms. Fife assumes ballot item 69.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

OIL, GAS AND SALT RESOURCES AMENDMENT ACT (ANTI-FRACKING), 2015 LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES RESSOURCES EN PÉTROLE, EN GAZ ET EN SEL (ANTI-FRACTURATION)

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 82, An Act to amend the Oil, Gas and Salt Resources Act to prohibit hydraulic fracturing and related activities / Projet de loi 82, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les ressources en pétrole, en gaz et en sel en vue d'interdire la fracturation hydraulique et les activités connexes.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This bill amends the Oil, Gas and Salt Resources Act to prohibit hydraulic fracturing. It provides the people of this province with a legal barrier to any cabinet that may want to allow it.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

HEALTH PROMOTION

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'd like to begin by welcoming some key special guests. I know I have the Canadian Cancer Society here, as well as the Ontario Lung Association, and up there in the gallery I know we have representation from the Heart and Stroke Foundation. Welcome to all of you.

The Dietitians of Canada and the thousands of dietitians working here in Ontario help to promote healthy eating by celebrating Nutrition Month every year in March. This year, Nutrition Month is focused on eating well at work, with activities and events across the country to encourage Canadians to enjoy healthy food. I would like to acknowledge the important contributions of dietitians in helping the people of Ontario stay healthy. Dietitians also play a critical role in helping people to avoid chronic illnesses like diabetes and heart disease.

The dedicated people at the Heart and Stroke Foundation are also working hard to keep people healthy. Their healthy weight action plan, launched recently, was designed by experts to help people achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

As the associate minister responsible for wellness, I'm truly grateful to all our dietitians, as well as organizations like the Heart and Stroke Foundation, for their commitment to our population's health. We're all on the same page in believing that prevention is better than cure. That

is why our government has taken steps such as introducing the Making Healthier Choices Act, 2014, to help ensure that Ontarians have the information they need to make better choices about staying healthy. I'm very pleased that it's going to be debated later on this afternoon.

A part of this legislation relates to the posting of calories on menus in restaurants and other food service premises. Under the proposed legislation, food service premises such as restaurants, grocery stores and convenience stores with 20 or more locations in Ontario would have to post calories on their menus and menu boards. They would also have to provide other information, such as the average amount of calories an adult should be consuming in a day, to give context to the calories that are being posted. I believe this is powerful information that will actually empower Ontarians to make healthy choices when they eat out.

1520

Providing Ontarians with the information they need to make the right decisions about their health is also one of the pillars of our government's Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care. We want to do everything we can to support Ontarians in taking charge of their own health.

Once again, to the members of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Canadian Cancer Society and the Ontario Lung Association, who have taken time to come out today, thank you for everything that you do, every single one of you for being here and for all of your hard work and advocacy on behalf of all Ontarians.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize the Heart and Stroke Foundation, who are with us here to promote awareness and funds for heart and stroke research. I'd like to mention Lequin Lu, Yipeng Ge and Emily Wen, who came to my office today to further tell us about the Heart and Stroke Foundation's advocacy. They've been in existence since 1952, advocating for public discussion, research and education about heart health in Canada.

The foundation has raised and invested more than \$1.39 billion in heart disease and stroke research and works with 140,000 volunteers, almost two million donors, more than 600 full-time employees, and it receives no operational funding from government sources. I think that actually deserves a round of applause in the Legislature.

Applause.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I certainly commend them for their work. Because I'm a nurse, I have to throw some statistics out to you. The statistics attached to cardiovascular disease are alarming. Every seven minutes in Canada, someone dies from heart disease or stroke. Heart disease and stroke are two of the three leading causes of death in Canada, and heart disease and stroke account for 16.9% of total hospitalizations and cost the Canadian economy more than \$20.9 billion every year in services. So it is still a huge issue, but the numbers of people

affected by heart and stroke and cardiovascular disease have certainly come down due to partners like the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada.

They did speak to us about Bill 45 before the Legislature, and we certainly agree that it's within this government's purview to promote health and wellness. We welcome all the efforts to improve public health for Ontarians. The legislation is designed to protect youth from the dangers of tobacco, by banning the marketing of tobacco products to children. This is, of course, an important step forward. But we also need to shut down illegal smoke shops. Ontario has a massive contraband tobacco problem. I've spoken about it for the better part of 10 years in this Legislature. It's a thriving black market, and it comprises anywhere from 30% to 50% of all tobacco sales in Ontario.

In 2009, the National Coalition Against Contraband Tobacco did a cigarette butt analysis of 110 high schools in Ontario, and 30% were contraband. I think we can all see the young people outside the schools smoking in our ridings that we represent. They are the very people that tobacco laws are designed to protect and are some of the top customers in the contraband market. The presence of illegal tobacco in Ontario continues to undermine public health initiatives, taking away the tax revenue that could be spent on cessation programs. The necessary part of addressing tobacco consumption in Ontario is addressing the illegal market in a meaningful way, with real financial and legal consequences.

Bill 45 also speaks to the pressing issue of the rise in obesity here in Ontario. We all know it's no secret that almost half of our population does not meet the physical activity and healthy eating recommendations made by organizations such as the Heart and Stroke Foundation. We need to seriously recognize that challenge. The trend continues to extend to our young Canadians, where 28% of children aged two to 17 are overweight or obese and face, of course, high risks of heart disease and high blood pressure because of that. I think we'd like to see a more wholesome strategy, like ramping up the daily physical activity for school-aged children. Physical education is where we need to be doing more, and I know that the Heart and Stroke Foundation supports this as well. I know that they have their Jump Rope for Heart which they initiate, which encourages kids to get active by skipping rope while they collect pledges for heart disease and stroke research. This program gives children the chance to jump and play alongside 750,000 other kids in more than 4,000 schools across Canada. Over the past eight years, the foundation has invested nearly \$3 million in strategic research in children and youth physical activity. So prevention plays an important role in decreasing heart disease in individuals.

I look forward to continuing to work with our trusted partners in the Heart and Stroke Foundation and developing responsible, sensible public policies that will improve our lives in the long term and help all of us to lead healthy, active lifestyles. So everyone go out and walk for at least 20 minutes today.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to add a few comments to the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. When it comes to celebrating, March is Nutrition Month, and although we are at March 25, I would say it's better late than never.

I'm really happy that the minister decided to make this statement, because nutrition plays such an important part in keeping people healthy. Whether you look at any of the chronic diseases that face millions of people in Ontario right now, most of them have a base in nutrition.

If we can get people to eat healthy food, have healthy weights, and add to this stop smoking and do exercise, 80% of cancer would disappear. It's worth repeating. How do we prevent 80% of all cancer? We all know people who have had a diagnosis of cancer, who have gone through treatment, some of them successfully and some of them not so much, but if we eat healthy food, have a healthy weight, stop smoking and exercise regularly, 80% of those hardships disappear instantly. This is why it's important to celebrate March as Nutrition Month. It's important to really take the time to educate people and think about what we eat.

We have a bill right now on the docket, the Making Healthier Choices Act, that would make a little step toward helping people make healthier changes. This step is really, really simple. When you will go to mainly big chain restaurants, on the menu board you will see, "Big Mac, \$3.99, 450 calories." It's as simple as this. If I have my way, Speaker, you would also see a little check mark that will tell you that this item has really high sodium, because the amount of salt that we eat is also directly related to a number of chronic diseases, whether we talk about hypertension or we talk about heart disease. They are closely related. Poor nutrition also has a direct impact on diabetes, on obesity, like the member before me was just talking about, and the list goes on and on.

I want to thank the Heart and Stroke Foundation for being here today, for coming to Queen's Park, for educating us and reminding us of how important it is to focus on prevention. They do—the foundation—fantastic work. Their education is bang-on. They have a very good communication strategy. Presently—I'll put a little pitch in for them—they're doing their big fundraising, so please support them as best as you can.

During the month of March, during Nutrition Month, on the radio station in Sudbury, every Thursday morning, the English CBC would have a dietitian on the program. It's called Morning North. They would have a dietitian who would basically take the opportunity in March to share some of the easy, little things that people can do to make healthier choices.

Today, she was talking about keeping a healthy snack in your car or in your purse so that when you are stuck in traffic, when you are coming home from supper thinking about what you have to do to get supper ready and suddenly you get the munchies, rather than go quick through the drive-through for fries, if you have little baggies of nuts or fruits or something in your car—even

better if you've packed fresh fruits with you and keep them in your car or in your bag, you are a whole lot more likely—and throughout the month she put forward a number of tips that are easy to use that don't require extra money or anything to make things healthier.

1530

I know that the Lung Association as well as the Cancer Society are here with us. Not only does Making Healthier Choices talk about menu labelling with calories and, hopefully, sodium, but it also talks about flavoured tobacco. And we all know that tobacco is another one where if we can prevent more and more people from picking up smoking, it is a whole lot easier than trying to quit smoking. So let's hope this bill goes through, and thank you to the Heart and Stroke Foundation and the Cancer Society as well as the Lung Association for being here.

PETITIONS

ENERGY POLICIES

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

“Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as ‘an extra payment covered by ratepayers over and above the actual market price of electricity’; and

“Whereas wind power is simply unreliable, blows mostly at night when we don't need power, creating a surplus Ontario then has to get rid of by paying Quebec and the United States to take it, and the total cost of producing the exported power was about \$2.6 billion more than the revenue Ontario received from exporting that power between 2006 and 2013; and

“Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has risen from \$700 million prior to the Green Energy Act to \$7.7 billion by 2013, and over the past decade, the cumulated amount is about \$50 billion; and

“Whereas Ontario now has the highest industrial rates in North America, and residential hydro bills are forecast to increase 42% by 2018 after peak hydro rates have already more than tripled since 2003; and

“Whereas local First Nations, property owners and aviation and aerospace industry stakeholders have voiced concerns about wind farm installations proposed by Innergex in Merrick and Mattawan townships in the riding of Nipissing;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on these proposed wind projects and the government's expensive energy policy by cancelling feed-in-tariff (FIT) subsidies, implementing an immediate moratorium on wind power development, and giving municipalities veto authority over wind projects in their communities.”

I agree with this, Speaker, sign this and give it to page Alysa.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was collected by the Ontario Health Coalition last night at a big forum they had in Sudbury. It reads as follows:

“Whereas Health Sciences North is facing major direct care cuts, including: the closure of beds on the surgical unit, cuts to vital patient support services including hospital cleaning, and more than 87,000 nursing and direct patient care hours per year to be cut from departments across the hospital, including in-patient psychiatry, day surgery, the surgical units, obstetrics, mental health services, oncology, critical care and the emergency department; and

“Whereas Ontario's provincial government has cut hospital funding in real dollar terms for the last eight years in a row; and

“Whereas these cuts will risk higher medical accident rates as nursing and direct patient care hours are dramatically cut and will reduce levels of care across our hospital,

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

“(1) Stop the proposed cuts to Health Sciences North and protect the beds and services;

“(2) Improve overall hospital funding in Ontario with a plan to increase funding at least to the average of other provinces.”

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

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Chris Ballard: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly entitled “Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition. I will affix my name to it and hand it to page Ian.

HYDRO RATES

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

“Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as ‘mostly consisting of the difference between the market price and the price paid to generators as set by the board for OPG or under contract with the government or the OPA’; and

“Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has been rising steadily over the last few years and is expected to continue to rise from \$700 million (prior to the 2009 passage of the Green Energy Act) to \$8.1 billion by 2014; and

“Whereas the Liberal government’s 2010 fall economic statement stated that hydro bills are expected to rise 46% by 2015, and that new renewable power generation would account for 56% of that increase; and

“Whereas small to mid-sized businesses across Ontario are seeing the global adjustment portion of their monthly hydro bills increase significantly to the point that it is now larger than the actual energy portion of their bills; and

“Whereas many of those businesses are now delaying investment or hiring, or both, and considering either closing or moving outside of the province of Ontario as a result of delivered-to-market industrial energy rates that are now the highest in North America;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on its expensive energy policy by cancelling the feed-in tariff (FIT) subsidies and treating Ontario’s energy as an economic development tool so that it once again is a competitive advantage for Ontario in retaining and attracting jobs and investment.”

I support this petition, affix my signature and send it down with Danielle.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker, and may I say you did a wonderful job on television over the lunch hour. That theatrical makeup made you look years younger.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a petition that says:

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

I certainly agree with this, sign it and give it to page Rahul to take up to the Clerk.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the member. That’s the shortest petition I’ve ever heard. It was wonderful.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

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

“Whereas over 2,400 students and 450 Everest staff are impacted by the 14 college location closures across Ontario, putting a financial strain on students, employees and their families; and

“Whereas students have the right to finish their programs, avoid unnecessary delays with graduation dates and not incur further financial costs of having to apply to another accredited institution to complete their program; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has been aware of the financial and legal difficulties facing Everest College and the US parent Corinthian Colleges for months; and

“Whereas students cannot afford to put their life on hold while the government struggles to sort out the mess involving another private college;

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

“To act in a prompt manner and protect the interest of Everest students by providing an extension for paying back OSAP loans, ensuring a full refund is provided and that students can complete their program without delay....”

I support this, will put my name on it and give it to Kari to bring to the desk.

1540

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It’s my pleasure to rise here today and read the following petition:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

“—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

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

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

I couldn't agree more with this petition. I will sign it and send it down to the table with Connor.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

I sign my name to this and give it to page Demily.

LYME DISEASE

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

“Whereas Ontario does not have a strategy on Lyme disease; and

“Whereas the Public Health Agency of Canada is developing an Action Plan on Lyme Disease; and

“Whereas Toronto Public Health says that transmission of the disease requires the tick to be attached for 24 hours, so early intervention and diagnosis is of primary importance; and

“Whereas a motion was introduced to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario encouraging the government to adopt a strategy on Lyme disease, while taking into account the impact the disease has upon individuals and families in Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to develop an integrated strategy on Lyme disease consistent with the action plan of the Public Health Agency of Canada, taking into account available treatments, accessibility issues and the efficacy of the currently available diagnostic mechanisms. In so doing, it should consult with representatives of the health care community and patients' groups within one year.”

It's my pleasure to support this petition and give this to page Japneet.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim McDonell: I've got many of these petitions on the carbon tax.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

“Whereas this uncompetitive tax will not impact businesses outside Ontario and will only serve to accelerate the demise of our once strong manufacturing sector; and

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

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

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

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

DENTAL CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was collected by Mrs. Léa Pilon, who lives in Hanmer, in my riding. It reads as follows:

“Whereas thousands of Ontarians live with pain and infection because they cannot afford dental care;

“Whereas the promised \$45-million dental fund under the Poverty Reduction Strategy excluded impoverished adults;

“Whereas the program was designed with rigid criteria so that most of the people in need do not qualify; and

“Whereas desperately needed dental care money went unspent and was diverted to other areas even though people are still suffering without access to dental care;

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

“To do all in its power to stop the dental fund from being diverted to support other programs; and

“To fully utilize the commissioned funding to provide dental care to those in need.”

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

WATER FLUORIDATION

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have here a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's entitled, "Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water."

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

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

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

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, a concentration providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentration to protect against adverse health effects; and

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

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

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I am putting my signature to this petition and will hand this over to page Ranen.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MAKING HEALTHIER CHOICES ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 POUR DES CHOIX PLUS SAINS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 11, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 45, An Act to enhance public health by enacting the Healthy Menu Choices Act, 2015 and the Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2015 and by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act / Projet de loi 45, Loi visant à améliorer la santé publique par l'édiction de la Loi de 2015 pour des choix santé dans les menus et de la Loi de 2015 sur les cigarettes électroniques et la modification de la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): This was last debated by Mr. Tabuns, from Toronto–Danforth.

Further debate?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'll be sharing my time with the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

I rise today in order to speak in support of Bill 45, making healthier choices. As members of this House may remember, this is the third time this legislation has been proposed and tabled in the Legislature, and we hope that this time it passes due to the daily impacts and long-term importance it will have on Ontarians' lives.

Our government is dedicated to helping families make healthier lifestyle choices. This is supported by Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care to make Ontario the healthiest place in North America to grow up and to grow old. We know that healthy kids grow up to be healthy adults. A healthy start is better for our kids and it's better for our health care system. The healthier our kids are, the less likely they are to develop a chronic disease later in life.

The proposed menu-labelling legislation is a key component of Ontario's Healthy Kids Strategy, which responds to the Healthy Kids Panel's recommendations for reducing childhood obesity. The Ontario government is committed to these changes and therefore has reintroduced this menu-labelling legislation.

These changes will make it easier for families to make informed and healthier food choices and to give them the right information at the right place and time. More specifically, this menu-labelling legislation will require calories to be posted on menus and menu boards in restaurants, convenience stores, grocery stores and other food service premises selling prepared food with 20 locations or more in Ontario.

We know that research shows having many labels at the point of purchase increases awareness of nutrition information and influences consumer behaviour. If passed, Ontario will be doing more by: raising public awareness about the calorie content of foods eaten outside the home, making it easier for people to make healthier choices when dining out, and encouraging industry to offer healthier items and reformulate high-calorie menu items.

1550

This legislation has been well thought through. As I mentioned previously, these proposed changes are part of the government's Ontario Healthy Kids Strategy, which follows the advice of sector experts on the Healthy Kids Panel. The government also consulted with the restaurant, food services and retail sectors to design and implement menu-labelling legislation.

Additionally, leaders in the medical community have offered their support. Dr. Scott Wooder, former president of the Ontario Medical Association, says, "Ontario's doctors have long supported menu-labelling legislation. Calorie labelling will have an impact on what people eat who are concerned about their health, and we urge that all parties support its quick approval."

When we look at the evidence, the legislation makes sense. We need to remember that nutrition-related health risks are high, but avoidable. Nutrition-related illnesses cause approximately 48,000 deaths annually in Canada, due largely to stroke, heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. Childhood overweight and obesity rates have nearly tripled nationally over the last three decades and have persisted over the past 10 years, with 28% of Ontario's children and over 40% of aboriginal children being overweight or obese. Childhood obesity is a significant health concern in Ontario and impacts health in childhood and beyond: 75% of obese children grow up to become obese adults.

In 2009, the economic costs of physical inactivity and obesity in Ontario were estimated at \$4.5 billion per year. These costs cannot be ignored. Currently, Canada's voluntary menu labelling is ineffective. In 2006, the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association launched its voluntary nutrition information program. However, we need to move from this optional reporting system to one that is effective, accountable and enforceable.

Something to recognize is that if the legislation passes, Ontario will be the first province in Canada to legislate menu labelling. Menu labelling is about providing information, building awareness and ensuring that Ontarians have the insights they need to make healthy choices for themselves and their children.

This legislation is about taking the next crucial step in our government's efforts to protect Ontarians' health. This is more than giving families the information they need to make a healthy choice; it is about ensuring that our children and future generations are supported when navigating the food environment we live in and making the choices that benefit them and all of Ontario.

I urge all members of this House to support Bill 45.

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

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to this very significant and precedent-setting piece of legislation, Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act.

Mr. Speaker, the most recent amendments to this legislation are particularly significant, as they propose swift action to ban all flavoured tobacco, including menthol. This is a substantial proposal, because we know that flavoured tobacco products have been proven to function as a gateway to permanent tobacco use and addiction. In fact, a recent study conducted in 2013 reported that one in four high school students has tried or smoked menthol cigarettes at least once every 30 days. We know that flavoured tobacco is marketed to our youth, and that's why this legislation is so significant: We are preventing future generations of Ontario youth from facing the problem of addiction to tobacco.

This is not the only action we are taking on the smoke-free front. Our government worked hard to toughen tobacco laws, ban smoking in public places and encourage more Ontarians to completely quit tobacco. The new issue that is evolving, which is the use of e-cigarettes, is

an emerging trend in Ontario, and there are concerns about the possible health effects of e-cigarette use, especially on our young people, as well as implications for tobacco use prevention and cessation.

At this time, there's limited research on the effectiveness of e-cigarettes to help people quit smoking. As a result, our government will be funding research projects to learn more about e-cigarettes, which will enable us to make more informed future decisions.

Bill 45: This legislation will ban the sale and supply of e-cigarettes to anyone under 19 and require retailers to request ID from anyone who appears to be under 25 and wishes to purchase e-cigarettes, and they'll be posting signs to explain the age-based restrictions.

However, it's also imperative that the federal government take action to regulate e-cigarettes and enforce the existing prohibition of nicotine in these products.

Mr. Speaker, banning flavoured tobacco and e-cigarettes is not the only reason this bill is so important. There are many other components that make it a necessary and important step forward for the health of Ontarians.

When we speak about healthy choices, the conversation is not just about what we choose to keep out of our system, but about how smart we are about what we choose to consume. I'm pleased that this bill also includes provisions to improve Ontario's health through menu labelling.

We know that healthy kids grow up to be healthy adults. The crux of raising healthy children is educating them about the content of their food. This is a daily discussion in my house, as I try to convince a five-year-old to eat all her vegetables and fruit. But I'm not so much worried about what she consumes at home; I'm more worried about what she might consume out of the home when she's with her friends.

We know that when kids learn about eating healthier early in life, they're less likely to develop diseases or other health complications in their later years. That's why this government is proposing that food service providers with 20 or more locations in Ontario be mandated to post caloric information about their prepared foods on menus and menu boards. I'm pleased that this applies to grocery stores and restaurants throughout Ontario.

I know that both the tobacco use and menu-labelling components of this legislation will make the constituents in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore very happy. I often speak with families who are concerned about a wide range of issues that impact their children, including tobacco addiction and childhood obesity.

I believe the actions outlined in this legislation are measures that Ontarians will rely on us to implement well. I know my constituents will be pleased to hear about how they can be even more informed about what they choose to eat. I'm very proud to be a member of a government that continues to take swift action to keep Ontario healthy.

I hope my colleagues on all sides of the House will join me in supporting this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. David Oraziotti: It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act, and share my time with the Minister of Community and Social Services and the member from Etobicoke–Lake-shore, as well as the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Speaker, there are glaring statistics and data that continue to confront us around healthier choices and around the use of tobacco products and tobacco-related products in the province of Ontario. We need to do all that we can, as a province and as a government, to ensure that we are raising the standards of health care and supports in the province of Ontario.

Just as a point of information, I think it's helpful to put it in context. Through the combined efforts of the province and the Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy, tobacco use prevalence has decreased from 24.5% in 2000 to 18.1% in 2013, representing 332,361 fewer smokers. Ontario currently has the second-lowest prevalence rate after the province of British Columbia.

Speaker, I want to take a minute and highlight a couple of the key elements of the legislation and express my support for them and why it's necessary for us to move forward with this legislation. I understand that all parties in the Legislature today are supportive of this legislation, which is great news for the people of Ontario.

We're moving forward with the proposed legislation and regulations that will strengthen our ability to reduce youth exposure to tobacco products. The Making Healthier Choices Act is not simply a reintroduction of our previous legislation, but the act has a number of new initiatives to help accomplish our government's goals.

1600

The proposed act would ban all flavoured tobacco, including menthol. Flavoured tobacco products have proven to be a gateway for tobacco use among young people. Canada's 2012-13 Youth Smoking Survey found that one in four high school students who have reported smoking have smoked menthol cigarettes in the past 30 days. Recent research in Ontario shows that menthol's cooling effect reduces the harsh taste of tobacco, making it more tolerable for new smokers and making youth more likely to become habitual smokers. The new research is why the government is proposing to include menthol in its ban of flavoured tobacco.

Approximately 18,500 young Ontarians in grades 9 to 12 use menthol tobacco products. I find that somewhat staggering, Speaker. I know the numbers have continued to decline, and as someone who spent 10 years in education and taught high school in a couple of different schools in the Sault Ste. Marie area, I'm certainly well familiar with young people who took up the use of tobacco products. You often try to educate young people about the harmful effects of this and making these life-altering choices at a young age and the implications that it will have later on to their health and well-being. So any way we can continue to educate people, to raise awareness and reduce the likelihood that a young person will take up smoking, is positive news for them and for all Ontarians.

An Ontario survey indicated that 121,600 Ontario youth in grades 9 to 12 had used tobacco products in the last 30 days, of which 55,300 used flavored tobacco products in those 30 days, so again, numbers that are fairly significant.

The proposed legislation would also strengthen our Smoke-Free Ontario Act by increasing penalties for selling tobacco to kids and making those penalties in fact the highest in the country. We hope that this will be coming into effect, if passed, on January 1, 2016. Stores and retail outlets would need to comply with the legislation.

I think it's also worth mentioning the implications with relation to e-cigarettes, which are also gaining some level of prevalence. We've worked hard to toughen tobacco laws, banning smoking in public places and encouraging more Ontarians to quit altogether. The use of e-cigarettes has emerged as a trend in Ontario, and there are obviously related health effects to that. We want to ensure there are restrictions in place in this legislation that will help ensure the diminished effects of e-cigarettes in the province of Ontario.

I want to also take a moment briefly to highlight the importance of menu labelling. I think this is a great initiative. We talk about the youth in Ontario being the future of the province. Healthier young people would make healthier adults; we all know that. That's why we introduced and constructed the Healthy Kids Panel. They provided us with invaluable advice, and we're moving forward on many of the panel's recommendations to help strengthen awareness around caloric intake with the requiring of menu labelling in the province.

I'm going to stop there, Speaker. I wholeheartedly support the bill. I think it's a great piece of legislation and I obviously welcome the support from the opposition members.

I'll turn the floor over to my colleague from Newmarket–Aurora.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the Minister of Government and Consumer Services and move to the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I thank those speakers who have gone before me. They have all made very important and valid points regarding Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act. I want to add to a number of comments they made and reinforce a number of comments they made as well about this important piece of legislation.

Some of the highlights I want to go over again: This government is committed to keeping Ontarians healthy. As a government, we have pledged to reduce tobacco use prevalence to the lowest in the country. That's why the government is moving forward with proposed legislation and regulations that will strengthen our ability to reduce youth exposure to all tobacco products.

The Making Healthier Choices Act is not simply a reintroduction of previous legislation. The act has been amended to include new initiatives to help accomplish our government's goals. The proposed act is looking to ban all flavoured tobacco, including menthol, as previous

speakers have mentioned. I'm not a smoker, Mr. Speaker, but I know from friends who are that when we were young, mentholated cigarettes were the cigarette of choice because they weren't harsh and I guess they tasted great. Most of my friends who smoked started with mentholated cigarettes. So I'm delighted to see that we'll make sure those won't be in the Ontario marketplace in the future for young people to get hooked on.

Shocking statistics: Canada's 2012-13 Youth Smoking Survey found that one in four high school students who report smoking have smoked menthol cigarettes in the past 30 days. I think that reinforces my days in high school and what I recall.

In fact, recent research in Ontario shows that menthol's cooling effect reduces the harsh taste of tobacco, as I said, making it more tolerable for new smokers. That, frankly, is just not acceptable. This new research is why the government is proposing to include menthol in its ban on the sale of flavoured tobacco.

We're also told that approximately 18,500 young Ontarians in grades 9 to 12 use menthol tobacco products. This same survey also indicated that 121,600 Ontario youth in grades 9 to 12 have used tobacco products in the past 30 days, of which 55,300 have used flavoured tobacco products in the past 30 days.

The proposed legislation would also strengthen our Smoke-Free Ontario Act by increasing penalties for selling tobacco to kids, making them the highest in Canada, and strengthening enforcement to test for tobacco use in indoor places. Testing for the presence of tobacco will help inspectors ensure that water pipes are not being used to smoke tobacco indoors.

Should this bill pass, tobacco realtors and distributors will have until January 1, 2016, to comply with the ban on flavoured tobacco.

I just wanted to take a minute and shift gears and discuss menu labelling. I know that in previous experience working for a consumer advocacy group we heard often, as we were looking at federal regulations about food labelling, about that unhealthy trinity of salt, sugar and fat, and that if you wanted to make a salt-reduced product, you increased the sugar or fat or both, and that worked for all three of them—and how important it is for consumers to have the information they need to make informed choices. It has been shown, Mr. Speaker, that when people are given information, they will make the right choices.

We know that healthy kids grow up to be healthy adults and that a healthy start is better for our kids and is better for our health care system. That's why the Ontario government has reintroduced this legislation, which will make it easier for families to make informed and healthy food choices and give them the right information at the right time and place. This proposed menu-labelling legislation requires calories to be posted on menus and menu boards in restaurants, convenience stores, grocery stores and other food service premises selling prepared foods with 20 or more locations—a good piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to full support in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm pleased to do a short two-minute response to the several members from the government side that found the time to speak on this bill today.

Bill 45 has laudable goals; there's no question about that. The Smoke-Free Ontario Act—a great idea. We would all be better off if there was no smoking whatsoever. But there's not a darn thing in this bill about how we're going to deal with the scourge of contraband tobacco, which accounts for between one third and 50% of the tobacco out there on the market today. What are they doing about that? Not a word. They just turn a blind eye to what's going on, and that's a huge problem.

As far as menu labelling: "It's wonderful; it's great." It's not going to do anything. If you really want to deal with the issue of obesity in our society, there has to be a lot more emphasis on physical fitness and exercise. Because somebody reads that there are X number of calories in something—listen, they've already grown a taste for it; they're going to go ahead and eat it. But it's what they do to burn those calories off that is really going to matter in our society. We've become way too sedentary. How many people actually have to work hard physically to make a living today? Very few. It's not like the old days, where you had to work from dawn till dusk to be able to put that food on the table. Now the problem is that we have too much access to easy food and we don't do enough physical exercise or labour to burn that food off.

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That's the challenge that is facing society today, not just here in Ontario but across the developed world. They're still starving in the underdeveloped world, but here life's too good, when you think of it. And if we don't exercise more, we will not deal with the problem. We've got to get people to get off their duffs and exercise more. That's the key.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand in the House today and comment on the Making Healthier Choices Act.

It was said that this is not just a compilation of previous bills but it does build on a long history of our health critic, Ms. Gélinas from Nickel Belt, bringing forward these issues to this House. I have to say, I'm encouraged that so many of those ideas are contained within the bill.

There are some gaps, though, that we have to be cognizant of. The government claims that menthol tobacco products will be banned, but the bill says nothing about menthol specifically, and it includes an exemption clause, section 3 of schedule 2, that the government can invoke to exempt certain flavoured tobacco products. Now, they say they're going to do it, but they do say a lot of things, Mr. Speaker, and so I think we have to be cognizant of that. I'm definitely encouraged by some of the ideas the member from Nickel Belt embedded in it.

The e-cigarettes issue, quite honestly, is a growing issue, but you know what else—and hopefully this bill can be amended once it's passed, because obviously we're going to support it—chewing tobacco is making a comeback for youth. Sometimes people call it snuff. This is something that is becoming very popular and, once again, it's highly addictive, and so there has to be a very progressive education campaign along with e-cigarettes and the flavoured cigarettes. Just in Kitchener-Waterloo alone there have been four new vape stores that have opened up. These are businesses that are looking to sell this product and move the product quickly. I think we have to be cognizant of the fact that once youth start to practise smoking, they're smokers in training, and I think that the precautionary element of the bill needs to be more aggressive around e-cigarettes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to rise in this House and to speak to Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act, second reading.

It is very well known that smoking and tobacco are the major cause of lung cancer. Its health effect is devastating and most people who smoke cigarettes develop lung cancer. This costs a lot of money for the province of Ontario and for every jurisdiction around the world. Also, its human misery is unimaginable. It's well known in the scientific community that about 85% of lung cancer is due to smoking cigarettes, and of course second-hand smoke increases the risk of one developing lung cancer.

As I said, 85% of lung cancers are due to smoking cigarettes. In order to prevent that in the province of Ontario, this government brought in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and we banned smoking cigarettes in public locations. This is something which we have done and it has helped us quite significantly to reduce the sale and also the use of cigarettes in public jurisdictions as well as in homes.

This act will ban, basically, the sale and supply of cigarettes to anyone under 19 years. It's also going to ban the promotion and display of e-cigarettes in places where e-cigarettes and tobacco products are sold. It will also prevent the owner or operator of a place of entertainment from employing or authorizing anyone to promote e-cigarettes or the sale of e-cigarettes at their places of entertainment.

Interjections.

Hon. Reza Moridi: E-cigarettes are a precursor for smoking, so by banning e-cigarettes we are going to prohibit people from smoking in the future.

I'm glad that I'm supporting this bill, and I urge everyone in this House to support this bill and to vote for it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. A little noisy over there.

Questions and comments? The member from Nipissing. I hope you can hear yourself with your friends beside you.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: With Garfield behind me? Well, it will be a challenge, but I'll struggle through it, Speaker. Thank you.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this. Look, as my colleague from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke stated earlier, it's harmless. Of course this is a bill that you can support with amendments—hopefully, a few amendments that we are going to propose—because it doesn't really get to the nub of the problem, the core of the problem.

You're going to ban menthol cigarettes, and all that is going to do is encourage people to go and get their menthol cigarettes on the reserves. That's exactly what this is going to do. We have a huge problem with contraband tobacco today, and all this bill will do for people 21 and over, or people 19 and over, is send them to the reserve to buy their contraband tobacco and buy their menthol and flavoured cigarettes on the reserve.

Let me tell you: One of the associations, the convenience stores association, did a survey last year and again this year. They came to many communities. North Bay was one. They went to my old high school, Scollard Hall. They collected the cigarette butts from the smoking area. They shovelled them up, put them in bags and trucked them down to Toronto, and students went through them all. It was an astounding number: Between the hospital, Chippewa high school and Scollard Hall—my high school—we're talking, in one instance, about 42% of cigarette butts being a Putter's brand, which is from a First Nations reserve. By the way, these schools are miles from the nearest reserve.

All this is going to do is take the people who want to smoke menthol cigarettes and who are of legal age—it's going to make them and force them to get what they are addicted to from the reserve and add to the contraband tobacco problem.

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

Mr. Chris Ballard: It's my pleasure to spend the final two minutes talking about Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act. I am delighted to hear the general support for Bill 45 from all parties here today. I mean, how can you not talk in favour of helping to stop young people from smoking and helping young people and families from eating improperly?

A couple of comments, again, about mentholated cigarettes: What the studies have shown the government, and the reason the government is encouraged and motivated to crack down on mentholated cigarettes, is that they are the gateway cigarette for many young people. If these don't exist nearby, chances are they won't be smoking, and they will not progress to being addicted to cigarettes. Those who are will probably find their cigarettes somewhere, but I think our focus is making sure that young people don't have easy access to mentholated cigarettes, which are the gateway cigarette of choice.

With regard to menus in restaurants, as I've said previously, all the research from a consumer advocacy perspective shows us that when consumers see choice, when

they have the information, they make the right choice. I disagree, quite frankly, about it being simply more exercise that's needed. I've heard a good phrase this afternoon: Bodies are made in the kitchen, not in the gym. I wholeheartedly agree, and I'm so looking forward to this legislation passing.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my pleasure again to rise today and speak to Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act, 2015.

Bill 45 is actually made up of three separate schedules. The first part of the bill is called the Healthy Menu Choices Act, and I'll discuss this section near the end of my remarks.

Schedule 2 consists of assorted amendments to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act. Now, this act is certainly in need of amending, as it currently leaves many Ontarians unprotected from second-hand smoke, even in the workplace, despite the aim of the original legislation.

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The final part of Bill 45 deals with a new and interesting issue: e-cigarettes. There is no reason for a child to be smoking a cigarette, electronic or otherwise. Banning the sale of e-cigarettes to anyone under the age of 19 is simply common sense.

The debate around e-cigarettes has in fact been intense, with scientists coming out on both sides of the issue. Last year, more than 50 public health experts and nicotine experts, including five Canadians, sent an open letter to the World Health Organization, urging them not to classify e-cigarettes as tobacco products. They argued that doing so could jeopardize a significant health innovation that could save hundreds of millions of lives.

David Sweanor, a law professor at the University of Ottawa who works on tobacco control, was one of that letter's signatories. In an interview, Professor Sweanor stated, "We're here to try to get rid of cigarettes, we're here to try to make cigarettes obsolete and we have the potential with technology to start to do that, and that would be one of the biggest breakthroughs we've ever had in public health."

Well, several weeks ago I met with Michael Perley, director of the Ontario Campaign for Action on Tobacco. Since health care is the number one expenditure for the provincial government, we need to continue to push to lower health care costs by improving people's health. I think we can all agree that legislation on e-cigarettes is sorely needed.

There have to be restrictions in place for the sale of these products to minors, or these cigarettes could potentially normalize smoking to minors who may not know that there are in fact risks to e-cigarettes. I welcome the restriction on the sale of e-cigarettes to those 19 years of age and older, which will hopefully stop the rising number of children who are vaping.

This is especially concerning considering the variance in chemical composition of nicotine liquid from one manufacturer to another. Speaker, there have also been

reports suggesting that people who smoke high-voltage e-cigarettes have greater exposure to formaldehyde. There's no regulation. One cigarette might be very low in it, but the one right beside it could be very high in it, and that in itself is not helping.

At the same time, we should be careful not to go too far and discourage adult smokers from using e-cigarettes as a tool to wean themselves off traditional cigarettes. A recent CBC News article stated, "Most experts believe they are less toxic than combustible cigarettes." However, there is very little long-term data available. What we don't want to see is an alternative to smoking traditional cigarettes banned outright. Thankfully, this legislation simply brings regulations on e-cigarettes closer to the regulations around regular cigarettes.

There are also numerous stores that only sell e-cigarettes, and several owners have voiced their concerns with this bill. The bill states, "No person shall, in any place where electronic cigarettes are sold or offered for sale, display or permit the display of electronic cigarettes in any manner that would permit a consumer to view or handle an electronic cigarette before purchasing it." Now, obviously, this is concerning for specialty stores that only deal with these products, as the customers won't be able to view or handle different e-cigarettes before they're purchased.

So let me state again that I am in favour of this bill and I am in favour of placing restrictions on e-cigarettes. It's the Wild West out there right now, Speaker, and people can smoke or vape whatever they please. Restaurants and hotels are just two groups that have asked for regulations to be placed on e-cigarettes so they will no longer have to argue with customers or guests who insist on smoking or vaping indoors.

There are also no laws forbidding the sale of these products to minors. That obviously must change. But we need to discuss negative impacts of the bill in addition to the many positives.

While Bill 45 seeks to address some of the problems in the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, there are a few issues that the bill still does not address. A constituent of mine, and I'll leave his name out of the record for his sake, has been having issues regarding second-hand smoke at the workplace for the last several months. At the constituent's workplace, a smoking area has in fact been designated outside—

Miss Monique Taylor: A point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A point of order, the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Sorry, member. I don't believe we have a quorum, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Clerks' table?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A quorum is present. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: At the constituent's workplace, a smoking area has been designated outside of the work-

place. However, the smoking area is set up beside the large garage doors so smoke drifts right into the building. All the while, management tells them that they are in compliance with the Smoke-Free Ontario Act and, because of the lack of clarity in the legislation, they are technically correct. I was shocked when I looked over the existing Smoke-Free Ontario Act and saw that it does not cover these sorts of issues.

In the eyes of my constituent, as it is currently written, the law basically does nothing. All it does is inconvenience smokers without even protecting people from second-hand smoke. What good does it do to force people to smoke a couple of feet away from a massive open door? Smoke doesn't care what provincial legislation has been passed; it just keeps drifting along.

This issue is not limited to this constituent. Many workers around the province also find themselves in a similar scenario on a daily basis. You don't have to look far for examples.

Expert tobacco researchers right here in Toronto who assess and evaluate the progress of smoking legislation each year have found that the province's tobacco strategy is not protecting everyone. The most recent report was released in January. The report stated that "too many Ontarians continue to be exposed to second-hand smoke in a variety of settings." Specifically, 29% of workers reported being exposed to second-hand smoke indoors or outdoors in the workplace within the past 30 days. The study also found that more than half the population continues to be exposed outdoors, with 49% reporting exposure to second-hand smoke at entrances to buildings, and 58% reported exposure on sidewalks and in parks.

My constituent and many other workers are put in a very awkward situation every day. They're forced to ask colleagues to move further away from entrances, or they have to bring up the issue with superiors. Obviously this doesn't make them the most popular employees in the workplace, and I'm very empathetic towards that.

Right here at Queen's Park, if you want to have a cigarette, you'd better be well away from the doorway. They have specific policies in place right here.

Unless a company decides to initiate a smoke-free policy, employees are free to smoke near doorways or air vents. Perhaps Bill 45 should be amended to provide greater clarity when it comes to where exactly smoking areas must be located in the workplace.

I can't recommend any specific regulation or requirements in terms of distance. That's best left to the government and ministry experts, but the problem has to be noted and it has to be addressed.

By having proper legislation in place, it will in fact save people not only from exposure to second-hand smoke but it will prevent them from having to alienate themselves from colleagues who happen to be smokers.

Protecting the health and well-being of our children is always our number one concern. If that is our goal, simply banning e-cigarette use will not be enough.

Drinking alcohol is prohibited for all Ontarians under the age of 19, but most Ontarians have already had a

drink by the time they become of age. The 2013 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey found that one out of every two students from grades 7 to 12 have actually had an alcoholic drink in the past year. Banning something is not the only tool required to cut down on usage. So just like under-age drinking, banning the use of cigarettes and e-cigarettes for minors will not be enough. More concrete steps must be taken to lower the overall rates of smoking, especially amongst children.

As has been previously mentioned by members during debate on this bill, we should also target illegal smoke shacks, which are an easy way for children to get very cheap cigarettes. If these products are banned while illegal alternatives are easy to come by, all that regulation will do is penalize those who play by the rules and follow the law and help those who choose to operate outside of the law.

You know, Speaker, in my riding—but in many ridings—there are many of these illegal smoke shacks that are up and operating. Of course, people will literally go out of their way to buy these illegal cigarettes. My question is: What's in those cigarettes as well? Are there regulations? No, there are no regulations on the type of tobacco that may be in there, but they buy them because the cigarettes are absolutely cheap and the money—well, who knows where that money goes? But I guarantee you this: The government isn't getting any of the tax revenue from those illegal smoke shacks.

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Speaker, I'd also like to switch gears for just a minute and talk about another key piece of Bill 45: schedule 1, the Healthy Menu Choices Act.

When you look at the nutritional information at popular chains, the numbers can be shocking. Guess which has more calories and fat: a Tim Hortons whole-grain carrot-orange muffin or a Timmy's maple dip doughnut. Are you ready? The whole-grain carrot-orange muffin has more calories.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: You've had some of those. I know that for a fact.

This muffin has more calories, more fat and more sugar than the maple dip doughnut.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Don't worry; I've had a few of those myself. It's okay.

Interjection: But not lately.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: But not lately; you're right.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It was.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm glad we're all sharing our menus. Can we get back to the debate? Thank you.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. The whole-grain carrot muffin has more calories, fat and sugar than the maple dip doughnut—and it's not even close. The maple doughnut comes in at 190 calories, six grams of fat and 11 grams of sugar. But get this: That whole-grain carrot-orange muffin, on the other hand, comes in at not

190 calories, not 250 calories, but 350 calories—imagine that—and a whopping 11 grams of fat and 26 grams of sugar. When we think we're having a muffin and it's a healthier choice—not so sure. So the next time you're at a Tim Hortons, remember to get a doughnut as a healthier choice over the muffins.

As shocking as that is—and that was only the first popular chain that I looked at—I'm sure that there are plenty of other astounding examples such as this in other chains as well. That's why it's so important for us to make sure that people have the proper information to ensure that they are making truly healthy choices. Using the previous example, a lot of people would probably pick up a muffin over a doughnut and think that they're actually making a healthier choice.

To be fair, the Tim Hortons muffin also contains six grams of dietary fibre and 20% of your daily intake of vitamin A. So we're trying to balance that off a little bit. But surely, many would be surprised that a doughnut has less calories, fat and sugar.

They're obviously getting a big plug. I don't know whether their RRRoll Up the Rim to Win is still going on or not. But if you have a choice of a muffin or a doughnut, take the doughnut.

Bill 45 also seeks to give more information to Ontarians who are simply looking to make healthier choices. Anything that makes it easier for Ontarians to make healthy choices is a good thing, in my opinion. It turns out that a lot of Ontarians share that opinion. As a matter of fact, in the year 2011, an Ipsos Reid poll found that approximately 95% of Ontarians supported requiring fast-food restaurants to list their nutritional information on the menus. They have to read it; then they have to decide whether they're going to believe it; and once they decide they're going to believe it, then they have to make that healthier choice, and of course, many already do.

Roughly 60% of large chain restaurants with more than 20 locations in Ontario already provide nutritional information voluntarily to their customers. They provide this information either on demand, on websites or directly in the store. As a matter of fact, I have seen it at a McDonald's, where they have the menu listed as well. I think that's a good thing. People need to make those healthier choices.

Speaker, if Bill 45 is passed, it will require owners and operators of regulated food service premises to display the number of calories in each standard food item sold at the premises as well as any other information required by regulation. Regulated food service premises are food service premises that sell meals for immediate consumption and that belong to a chain with 20 or more Ontario locations, or that are brought under this act by regulations.

I'm sure that members on all sides of the House will agree that it's not always easy for us here in the Legislature to make healthy food choices. It's challenging at times, believe me. I probably have been living proof of that as well. But, you know, the reason for that obviously could be because we have hectic schedules.

Sometimes they force us to either skip meals or eat on the road, whatever the case may be. It's also difficult for our hard-working and talented Queen's Park staffers to make healthy choices all the time as well.

Just as a point of interest, over the Christmas break I made a healthy choice. I took advantage of some down time and started to make healthier choices. Thanks in large part to my wife, Dianne—I've got to give her a plug on this—I'm down a few belt notches since Christmas. In my plan, it's all about calorie count. Others have other plans but I chose calorie count. If you put in less calories than you burn off in a day—if I do the math—you're going to lose weight, and I have. It's really simple when you come right down to it.

Interjection.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: The question was asked, how much have I lost. In three months, I've lost 45 pounds but I've gained 10 pounds in hydration, and I needed that. That's the one thing that people don't look at, their hydration levels.

Again, I looked at protein—gotta have protein, so I take a meal shake. Other proteins include fish such as whitefish, tuna, salmon, shrimp; even grass-fed beef. Of course, I love my veggies. I didn't eat a lot of carrots, though; that wasn't in it, but spinach and cabbage were, and I like that. And fruits, of course: I love apples, strawberries, oranges. It's all good stuff.

But here's the key, Speaker: controlled portions. That's what I had to learn. That's what I had to adjust my thinking to. I also, during all that, eliminated sugars, breads, pastas, pizza. However, gluten-free is okay—

Mr. Chris Ballard: Pasta?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I know. My Italian friends are screaming at me right now. Maybe they have gluten-free spaghetti. I'm sure they do—and minimal dairy products.

As I said earlier, in the three months I lost 45 pounds but I added 10 pounds in hydration, which is a good thing as well. And you know what? As Tony the Tiger would say, I feel great. Don't worry, I won't be auditioning for any Tony the Tiger commercials any time soon.

Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to conclude my remarks by again stating my support for Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act. Labelling menus with calorie counts is certainly one part of the solution. It's a move that I personally support, and I look forward to being able to more easily see this information once this bill is passed. Calorie counts have been instrumental in my own efforts to make healthier choices. They will also help Ontarians make healthier choices.

I do want to add one thing, though. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, in a two-minute question and answer, responding to one of our government colleagues, commented also on the importance of physical activity. I think that's also critical. Yes, I am working out more as well, because you've got to strengthen those muscle groups.

But, you know, when we talk about calorie counts, we talk about all this—this is only one tool in the toolbox that can be used to fight childhood obesity. Rates of

childhood obesity are on the rise, and we have to make it our public priority to address this issue today before it becomes a crisis tomorrow. In my opinion, we need a strategy to increase daily physical activity for our school-aged children. Physical education is an area where we can do a lot more for this province.

In conclusion, at the end of the day, it's up to Ontarians and not governments to make healthy choices. All we can do is empower them and give them the information they need to make their healthy choices. Bill 45, while not all-encompassing, is a good step.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It is indeed a pleasure to stand in my place here this afternoon and speak to G45. As we know, in this case, the "G" stands for Gélinas, because the member for Nickel Belt, France Gélinas, has brought forth not seven, not eight, not nine, not 10 but 11 private members' bills on menu labelling and stricter tobacco control measures over the last few years. In fact, last August, she wrote the Premier, urging the regulation of e-cigarettes. So this bill should be named in honour of the member from Nickel Belt.

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If the government wanted this legislation, they could have brought it forth and they could have approved her first private member's bill in March 2009. In 2009, six years ago, this was first put on the table. She also talked about menu labelling in chain restaurants.

I know we're not supposed to use salty language in this chamber, so I'm putting you on notice right now that I'm going to say "sodium." I'm not going to say "salt." Why hasn't the government put sodium labelling and regulation in this bill and not just the calorie count? Because the salt is a killer. The salt can get you just as much as the calories. Let's not hide our head in the sand.

Earlier, one of the members talked about mentholated cigarettes. I have to tell you, I've been married this year for 40 years. I haven't smoked in more than 40, but years before that I used to smoke menthol, and for one reason only: If someone came up and said, "You got any smokes?" and I said, "Just a menthol," they said "No, no," and they'd go to somebody else.

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

Mr. Vic Dhillon: It's an honour to speak on Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act.

As most of us know in this chamber, our health care budget is over 40% of every dollar that we pay into taxes and it's increasing every year. A large part of that increase stems from the fact that people aren't making healthier choices and there is consumption of tobacco, predominantly cigarettes. So one of the steps that we're taking is making it difficult for our children and our youth to obtain cigarettes, especially the flavoured and the menthol cigarettes, because often the studies have shown that flavoured cigarettes and menthol cigarettes are the gateway for our children and youth to start smoking.

As well, in this bill we're discussing the need for menu labelling. As members before me have suggested, some of the wisest or the most careful people who watch their diet can let things get carried away and we don't realize exactly how many calories may be in such a small portion, so I think both of these initiatives will go a long way. The end goal is to make sure that our citizens, Ontarians, are healthier and they live to the maximum amount possible in the best of health. I think this bill will go a long way. I'm looking forward to the debate, and hopefully we'll all support this.

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 45 and follow up the speech by our member from Chatham-Kent-Essex. He identified a lot of the problems that this bill identifies.

Basically, I agree with this bill. It identifies about three different areas of problems that relate to health care, and it's trying to help us make healthier Ontarians. I think we all have to agree with that. Smoking, of course, we've known for decades, if not 100 years, is bad for our health. The Heart and Stroke Foundation was in my office today, and they've been in many people's offices in this building. Earlier today they were in the gallery here. They have some excellent documents that they explained to me and brought to my office, identifying exactly what kind of trouble cigarettes cause. Basically, they're trying to head off having young people encouraged to pick up the bad habit of smoking. E-cigarettes are part of that problem as a temptation because it's not a cigarette, but it is nicotine, so it creates that dependency on the addictive drug nicotine, which would lead to cigarettes.

Flavoured tobacco is another one of those attempts to appeal to young people. The packaging is even attractive. It looks like gum or candy. This is a terrible thing, that we have companies that are actually going to this length to make things look like candy, taste like candy, not be cigarettes, but really leading to addicting young people to become smokers so that they'll be buying cigarettes for the rest of their lives. That's an easy enough problem to identify. It's an easy enough problem to fix, which this piece of legislation will do.

The illegal cigarettes that come from the native folks here in this country, which is criminal activity, are unregulated. Unfortunately, what happens when legislation like this is created, and it's well-meaning, is we drive people to the criminal, illegal levels of tobacco.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm proud to stand and speak on Bill 45. You know, we've come a long way when it comes to health in Ontario and worldwide. We're all aware of what health is. We're all aware of what's healthy for us and what's not healthy for us, but yet we still actually have those vices.

When we talk about smoking, that is a vice that many people have tried to give up over the years. Some are successful; some aren't. I know there are people who are

chain smokers. There are people who quit and then three months later go back and start again. It's a very unhealthy habit.

I know one of our colleagues here in the NDP caucus put their mind to stop smoking. I can say congratulations to them; they are still not smoking. It's quite an accomplishment.

I met this afternoon with the Heart and Stroke Foundation. The representative had some products from the flavoured cigarettes. She pulled two items out of her bag. Speaker, I could not tell the difference between a lip gloss and a flavoured cigarette. They were the same size; they were the same shape.

It's very clear, Speaker, that things have evolved in the smoking industry where they're targeting youth. They are getting smarter about marketing, who their target market is and how to bring them in. So I think this is a great step forward with regard to flavoured cigarettes. The packaging is completely misleading. It's certainly targeted for young people. It can be as young as 10 years old. Kids are very impressionable and they are exposed to many things. I think this bill is a great step to curbing that marketing targeting our youth for flavoured cigarettes.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

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

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'd like to thank the members from Windsor–Tecumseh, Brampton West, Carleton–Mississippi Mills, and, of course, London–Fanshawe.

I was rather intrigued by the member from London–Fanshawe having difficulty seeing the difference between lip gloss and an e-cigarette. Try to smoke the lip gloss. I say that with terrible humour in mind.

But the serious element of this particular bill—as I mentioned earlier, it has three aspects: healthy menus, and I like the idea that calories, fat and sodium are going to be listed on bills, or on billboards, so to speak. I like the idea of smoke-free. Again, as I mentioned in my previous discussion or previous speech, I am not about to say that no-smoking areas have to be so many metres away. I think around hospitals and public buildings it's nine metres, but for private buildings and private property it's up to the management. So I encourage them to do something more serious about that. And, of course, we talked about e-cigarettes and flavoured cigarettes and how bad they are.

I just want to talk very briefly. I remember when the member from Nickel Belt actually presented her bill. I was so impressed with her presentation. I truly was. I thought, “You know what? This is very good.” I actually sent her a note complimenting her on her presentation. Also, the chord she struck with me was the calorie count on there. She was singing right out of the same song book as I had.

One thing I mentioned earlier, having lost about 45 pounds since January 1, which is wonderful and I feel great, I talked about the importance of hydration levels. There's one thing that also helped, and I want to encour-

age people. Coconut oil is something that really will burn calories. It's a little bland, but do you know what? You can get used to bland. It's okay.

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Mr. Percy Hatfield: You're a Conservative. You're used to it already.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Yeah, there you go.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: It's a privilege to have the opportunity to speak today to Bill 45, because making healthier choices is not just good personal practice; it's good for our province. When it comes to health care, prevention should be a top priority—anything we can do to improve our health care and make it better for the future. We can live a more active and more productive life, but we can enjoy more of what the world has to offer. We can take some strain off our health care system so that it can focus more on some of the serious challenges that many face. An ounce of prevention is definitely worth a pound of cure.

This healthy choices act comes with three schedules, each addressing a particular initiative. Schedule 1 requires owners and operators of some restaurants to display the number of choices—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A point of order, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I believe the House has lost its quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Clerks' table?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): We'll have to ring the bells.

Interjections.

Miss Monique Taylor: Oh, look. Run; run.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): A quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A quorum is present. Thank you.

Continue.

Miss Monique Taylor: It's so nice that the members could join us, Speaker.

The healthy choices act comes with three schedules, each addressing a particular initiative. Schedule 1 requires owners and operators of some restaurants to display the number of calories in their menu items and allows other information to be included through regulation.

Schedule 2 amends the Smoke-Free Ontario Act in various ways: prohibiting the sale of promotional items with tobacco, outlawing flavoured tobacco with some exemptions, allowing inspectors to enter a broader range of places, and increasing fines and penalties for contraventions of the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

Schedule 3 attempts to address some of the issues around the growing use of electronic cigarettes: making them illegal for youth under 19 years of age, placing restrictions on the display and promotion of electronic cigarettes, regulation on where they can be sold—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A point of order, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. I believe the House, once again this afternoon, has lost its quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Clerks' table?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): A quorum is present.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A quorum is present.

Continue, the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. I offer this overview because an awful lot of what is in this bill is quite familiar to us. It's familiar because many of these changes have been proposed in this Legislature before by my NDP colleague the member from Nickel Belt. I think it's somewhere around 11 different private member's bills that she has introduced. The government has been very slow to act on these measures, and they've been dragging their feet for far too long on the important matters that affect our health and our health care system.

I think it's important that we recognize the work done by the member for Nickel Belt, who has continually fought to bring thoughtful, meaningful private member's bills to make sure that the decisions on these issues are in the agenda. Her arguments were backed up by science and by supportive professionals here in Ontario, across Canada and internationally.

Speaker, about 12 years ago the World Health Organization said that nutrition labelling could be an important part of preventing the growing burden of non-communicable diseases. A broad range of experts and organizations offered their support to those private member's bills over the years: the Registered Nurses' Association, the Ontario Public Health Association, the Canadian Institute of Child Health, the Canadian Diabetes Association, the Ontario chronic disease association, the Ontario Medical Association—the list goes on and on. They are pretty powerful, informed voices, voices this government should have been listening to years ago.

I want to take a moment to talk about some of the initiatives in Hamilton in relation to healthy foods, Speaker. In 2011, Bill and Judy Wilcox decided to do something to provide good, nutritious food for low-income people in Hamilton. They believed that some of the empty lots in our city were just that, sitting there unused, could be sustainable sources of good food to alleviate the hunger and, in particular, the lack of healthy food. So the Hamilton Victory Gardens was born.

Starting with one lot and 2,200 pounds of food for the local food banks and hot meal programs in 2011, they now have, in a few short years, grown to 12 different locations across the city, tended by 250 volunteers, and an incredible annual harvest of now over 45,000 pounds of produce.

The innovative approach of the Hamilton Victory Gardens combines urban agriculture and charitable giving. It teaches students and volunteers about the sustainable methods they use. This is a program that strives to end hunger, and it does so in a way that promotes healthy eating and educates all those involved on how to get the most and the best out of our surroundings.

Another constituent of mine is named Al Nason. Al is a schoolteacher who spent a number of years working in developing countries, helping them to tackle the serious food issues that they face. As a teacher, he developed a program built around the building and operations of an aquaponics system. This system grows vegetables on top of a tank of water which contains fish. Al tells me that tilapia is the best fish for this. The fish, through their waste, provide the nutrition that allows the plants to grow—and, boy, do they grow.

A system like this can see vegetables grow to maturity in a much shorter time than it would take through a normal agriculture method. Also, being housed indoors, they can be grown year-round. Like most operations, there are benefits to having large systems, but small productive systems can be set up in your home. In fact, Al set up an aquaponics system in my constituency office. It was great to help promote the idea.

A very important element to the school program is that it engages students who don't fit neatly into the expectations of a regular school program. Kids who are struggling academically enter this program and see their lives turned around. Many have gone to college and university, driven by their newfound interest in local sustainable agriculture.

Al is a true believer. He spends countless hours all across Ontario promoting aquaponics and the possibilities it holds to address our food security. We are hopeful that he can fulfill his dream of creating self-sustaining systems throughout Ontario, creating partnerships with those organizations who take on the task of tackling hunger in disadvantaged households.

That's a couple of very positive examples from my community about what can be done to promote healthy food, but in general terms, there are clearly some problems with the diet of many Ontarians. One in four adults is obese: about 6.3 million people. Particularly worrisome is the fact that the number of obese people has increased by 17.3% since 2003. Nearly one third of Ontario's children are obese or overweight.

There has been extensive research into the effects of this. Excessive body weight is associated with numerous chronic conditions, including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, gallbladder disease and certain types of cancer. Statistics Canada has reported that obesity has become one of the world's greatest

health concerns and threatens to undo gains made in life expectancy during the 20th century. Eating the right foods has an impact on your physical health.

But there is a growing body of evidence that healthy food has an important influence on mental health. Dietitians of Canada said, in a 2012 report, “Many nutrition initiatives that registered dietitians help facilitate support mental health by enhancing social inclusion, self-reliance, self-determination, food security, healthy body image, and reducing health and social inequities.”

1700

But following a balanced, nutritious diet isn't always easy, cheap or convenient. It's very difficult for many families to make ends meet on one income. Many people are having to work longer hours. With the growth of part-time jobs, there is—

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Point of order, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A point of order, the member from London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: We've lost a quorum.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Clerks' table?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Anne Stokes): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): A quorum is now present.

Continue.

Miss Monique Taylor: With the growth of part-time jobs, there are far too many people who have to juggle schedules to get to two or sometimes three or more jobs just to piece together one full-time wage. For some, travel time can account for half of the time they spend away from home on any given day. The demands of work and the growth of precarious employment means people have much less time to cook dinner and, inevitably, spend more time eating out.

Sixty percent of Canadians eat out one or more times a week. For 40% it's a few times a week, and 7% eat out every day. This is especially true for younger people. Many of those part-time jobs I mentioned are in the food industry, an industry that has become inundated with large chains offering fast food or prepared meals. Mom-and-pop country-style kitchens are increasingly being squeezed out of the market. They are being squeezed out by restaurants that often have high levels of calories and sodium in their meals. Sodium: Now, there's something that's strangely missing from this legislation, but I'll come back to that later.

It's been reported that the average sit-down meal in a restaurant has 56% of an adult's daily calorie requirement and 98% of an adult's daily limit on sodium. That's one meal in a restaurant. An additional problem is that the calorie and sodium levels are impossible to determine from restaurant to restaurant by just looking at what you're ordering. These levels can vary greatly for what is on the surface the exact same meal.

In one study, for example, it was found that calories in an order of ribs could be anywhere from 330 to 2,500. The same study found that a stir-fry in one restaurant

could have twice as much sodium as a similar dish in another. Or even more alarming, for sandwiches and wraps, there could be a 78-fold difference in sodium levels, depending on where you ate. Customers have a right to know about the ingredients in their meals, but it's also true that much of these differences are a result of a large portion offered at some restaurants.

I thought you were going to call quorum on me again, Speaker. Jeez, I was ready to sit down.

Large portions are perceived as a deal and that's exactly why they do it. Marketing folks know that customers want to believe that they're getting their money's worth, and for many that is often more important than getting the healthier choice.

We were all brought up—well, I know most of us, and in my family it was a definite that we had to eat everything that was on our plate. Think of those days, back in the Pink Floyd days, when you were listening to The Wall in your basement and the school teacher in the background saying, “If you don't eat your meat, you can't have any pudding. How can you have any pudding if you don't eat your meat?” He said it twice just to drive the point home. So maybe it was our schoolteachers. Maybe we had parents who grew up during the Great Depression and the wars. But we knew that food was a scarcity and it was a precious commodity for everyone. Sometimes some families thought it was just manners to make sure that you ate everything on your plate. Perhaps, even though we ourselves are not short of food, we feel guilty about wasting food.

Whatever it is, it's in our makeup that we finish everything that is in front of us. So when we're in a restaurant and we are faced with a huge serving, we dutifully comply, satisfied in the belief that we got our money's worth and promising to return for more of the same at a later date, and with not a single care for the damage that we have just done to our body in the process.

Then, there it is in the fast food order: “Do you want fries with that? Will that be a combo?” I know of one place, and I'm sure I'm not alone, where you can get a chicken sandwich and fries for \$7.50. If you get a pop with that, it costs you \$6.50. That's right: The exact same meal with a good-sized pop thrown in is a dollar less. What sort of economic sense does that make? And for the customer, what sort of sense does it make not to take the deal? Once you've taken the deal, what sense does it make not to drink the pop, even though you didn't really want the pop in the first place? It doesn't make any sense until you consider that you've just added 300 to 500 calories more to your meal, about a quarter of the total calories you should have for an entire day.

What sense does it make to consume more calories when we have no reason other than it's there and we already have it? But that's the reality facing people when they eat out, and that's why we need menu labelling in restaurants. It needs to be done by law because, quite frankly, we can't trust businesses to do it out of their own goodwill.

Restaurant chains have been boasting for a few years about their commitment to making information available

on their meals. I was reading a report prepared by the city of Toronto on menu labelling. In it, they commented on a survey of 136 outlets of 27 chain restaurants in Canada. They were all chains that had committed to providing nutrition information. The survey found that 18 of those 27 chains provided nutrition information at some of their outlets. Only one chain had information available at all of the outlets surveyed. Unfortunately, the information they provided was in the tray liner, and you don't get a chance to look at the tray liner until you've actually ordered your food and you're sitting down to eat. Some restaurants put the information on their website, or on the back of the placemat, or in the brochure behind the counter, which you need to ask for. It is not easily accessible when deciding what to order.

That's why we need this type of legislation: rules that make them provide nutrition information that can be easily viewed by everyone as they decide what they are going to have.

I do think there is room for improvement in this bill. First, why does this legislation make no effort to include sodium levels in this mandatory reporting? Everything that I've read—expert opinions, calls for action—include sodium along with calories as being essential, effective menu labelling. That needs to change.

Why is there no reference to the recommended daily intake of calories and sodium? This legislation is, in essence, an awareness campaign, and many people simply do not know what dangerous levels are. To make the information truly meaningful to everyone, it seems obvious that we should be providing a yardstick for them to measure their intake by.

The final comment I have on this schedule of the act is to question why we are limiting this legislation to chains with more than 20 locations in this province. Not only that, why are we denying municipalities the ability to create bylaws that would improve menu labelling in their own communities? These items should definitely be addressed when this bill goes to committee. There's plenty of room for that improvement.

Speaker, there has been quite a significant culture shift with respect to smoking over the past number of years, and it has happened because of the research, huge awareness campaigns and legislative restrictions on how cigarettes can be marketed and consumed. Anybody who smokes finds it very difficult to be proud. There are few smokers who actually choose to smoke instead of preferring not to smoke. This shift has happened in the face of fierce lobbying by Canadian and multinational cigarette companies with very deep pockets.

The job is not yet done, because tobacco companies understand that their best marketing tool is addiction. They just need to get their foot in the door. We need to help our youth not be the next generation of smokers. We need to be aware of the ability and the agility of cigarette manufacturers to find ways to sell their products.

Back in 2008, the member from Nickel Belt and the member from Brant co-sponsored a bill to ban the sale of individual flavoured cigarillos. The bill passed, but because it took time for the ban to be enacted, the to-

bacco companies were able to find loopholes and already had new products on the market. Flavoured cigarettes are nothing less than a blatant attempt by tobacco companies to target youth when they are the most amenable.

The health effects of smoking and second-hand smoke are well documented. From an economic point of view, tobacco-related diseases cost the Ontario economy at least \$1.6 billion in health care costs each year, and more than \$4.4 billion in lost productivity. They account for half a million hospital stays each year. So, yes, these further restrictions on flavoured tobacco products and promotional items should move forward.

1710

Another element of the act is the regulation of electronic cigarettes. They are a relatively new product but there are currently no age restrictions for buying or marketing them. That has to be a huge concern and we need to ensure that we are treating e-cigarettes the same as we are treating tobacco.

A further big concern is that there are very limited studies available on the health effects of electronic cigarettes. Here we have a product that is growing in popularity, but we are quite ignorant as to what people are putting in their bodies through their use. Like other members, I have heard from a number of people who have used electronic cigarettes to quit smoking. They argue strongly that they have tried unsuccessfully to quit many times. They firmly believe that e-cigarettes have enabled them to finally get off the cigarettes.

Speaker, I'm a former cigarette—I'm out of time. See how quickly it goes, Speaker?

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Deputy Premier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Oh, sorry.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you. I'm delighted to be able to speak for just a couple of minutes about this very important legislation. It was legislation that I introduced prior to the election and it has now been reintroduced and it's even stronger than it was, so I'm very, very pleased. I want to focus on the Healthy Kids Panel that was really the impetus of the healthy eating part of this legislation.

We know that our health care system is increasingly caring for people who, had they taken better care of themselves, would not be needing health care. So we need to focus on prevention. We need to focus on wellness. This is one more step in the right direction of giving people information they need to make the healthiest choice possible.

We appointed a Healthy Kids Panel, and they did a fantastic job. I really appreciated the approach they took. It's about giving parents the information they need to help make healthy choices for their kids. The reality, as we've heard from others, is that currently it's pretty hard to know when you go into a restaurant what the calorie content is in the food that is on the menu. To just give parents that little extra bit of information will help them make healthier choices.

My colleague just told me that he went into a pizza—

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Extreme Pita.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Extreme Pita. They already have the calories posted. The member from Ottawa Centre actually changed his choice based on the calorie labelling. There was one pita available at 600 calories. He thought that was the best one, but then he changed it to one that had only 350 calories, a healthier choice made because this particular company, Extreme Pita, is ahead of the curve. They've already made the decision to give their patrons that information.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you to the Deputy Premier.

Questions and comments.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Of course, we'll be supporting this bill, but we would like to see it go farther so that it actually gets some of the intended consequences. We're seeing cases where we make it tougher on our children to get things like some of the, I suppose, bad food in their schools and they just go elsewhere.

In our local high school there are so few people using the cafeteria that if there's a school trip somewhere or a sports trip, they actually close down the high school because there's not enough people going to eat in the cafeteria. They're going down the street. It's hard to get into a restaurant because they're buying the foods they like. That shows that you can do a lot of things and you think you're doing the right thing, but now the children are going down the street, spending more money and still buying the same foods. It comes down to really showing how our diets work, the use of education. I think it's commendable that they have the ability then to look at the calories in the food so that they can make their own choices.

As adults, we're very quick to have the food we like as well. I think if we start off right and have a knowledge of what foods are good and which ones are bad, we can make a difference and really change our habits, because it comes down to habits. Just by making something unavailable—just like cigarettes—in my area, the health unit has conducted studies, and in some of the schools, up to 90% of the cigarettes are contraband. It's a real problem, not only from the idea of the lost taxes, but it has become such an attractive way of making money. Our youth are getting involved with the drug trade, the cigarette trade, and they're getting sentences and they're getting records.

Again, if we're really going to have any impact, we have to go about trying to get at making the rules so that we have an impact on what's happening.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: An honour and a privilege to stand in the House today and make comments after those made by my colleague from Hamilton Mountain, who brings great passion to her work every time she stands in this House.

Speaker, she's a woman of great strength as well. She smoked for 28 years and, one morning a year and a half ago, woke up and said, "That's it. I quit," and she did.

She takes great pride in the people she represents, the people in her riding who looked at empty lots and said, "This would be a good place for a community garden." They went out and created Hamilton Victory Gardens.

Speaker, that reminds me so much, in my riding, of the Ray and Shirley Gould Community Garden at the Unemployed Help Centre in Windsor, as well as the Ford City Community Garden on Drouillard Road in Windsor.

As many of you know, at one time, Drouillard Road was a neighbourhood in decline, but it is now invigorated and a vibrant place to be, and a good deal of that credit goes to Steve Green, who started the Ford City Community Garden and then, from there, went down and reinvigorated the Windsor farmers' market in downtown. So, credit to both Steve Green and to Raymond and Shirley Gould.

I mention Shirley, Speaker. Last year, we lost Shirley. She was a real community activist, a community leader, and put her heart and soul into many activities, especially the Unemployed Help Centre and the community garden. I happened to be up here at a committee meeting and could not get to her services, and I've always regretted that.

It's people like Shirley and Raymond Gould and Steve Green who bring community gardens to our communities for fresh food for the people most in need. I hope this bill will help people eat better in the future.

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

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate today, and great to hear from the members on the other side. I think what I'm hearing is that there appears to be support for Bill 45, and some suggestions as to how it could be made better, perhaps, or other things people would like to see included in the bill.

It strikes me that the reason we have this bill is that over the years—certainly in my lifetime—I've seen a change in the way that people eat and the choices they make in what they eat and the things they put in their body.

I grew up in a time when processed food was just becoming cool. Products like Pop-Tarts, powdered mashed potatoes and all sorts of strange things were just being introduced to the market. The people who were making the purchasing decisions at the time were deciding that these were pretty good things and they should feed them to their kids. I think in the fullness of time, we've realized that some of those products perhaps weren't the best products.

I know, as I was raising my own son, who is now 34, that my wife and I decided we didn't want him to eat at a fast food outlet that everyone here would know. It wasn't the food so much that was the hard part in keeping him away. It was the toy that came with the food. Everybody else in his class had a little action hero, and he didn't have one. But I still thought we were doing the right thing. I think what we found out about some of the products that are actually in that fast food outlet, and some of the changes that they've made along the way—

in hindsight, it was the right thing to do. I hope my 34-year-old son has gotten over not having that toy. I'm pretty sure that he has.

But this goes along with that. I think it's things we learn along the way. We've realized that how we keep ourselves healthy—that we've got responsibility, and some of that is entailed in the choices we make as to what we put in our own bodies. This just helps us along.

1720

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

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the Deputy Premier, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh and the Minister of Labour for joining in on my portion of the debate today.

Yes, I was a smoker for 28 years. I was able to just wake up one day and say, "I'm not going to smoke today," and I stand here today and still have not smoked. But other people don't have that opportunity. We know that so many people struggle to quit smoking, and the e-cigarettes are something that people are finding their way with: "Well, I'm not inhaling smoke, so I'm doing okay." The problem is that they're still untested, so maybe that's something we can really push for, to make sure that we're getting that proper testing on these vapors and these e-cigarettes so that we know what people are ingesting. Then we can give them proper research and really identify what that's doing to their bodies.

I have to say that yes, I've seen places that are making those healthier choices on their menus also. I will buy from that healthier menu, and I think it's a great thing because, like many in this House, we're always busy and we're always on the go. I like the Pita Express because I can make a good, healthy choice, and I like the fact that I know what that healthy choice is.

Would I like to see sodium added to that? Absolutely. I think that's an absolutely critical part of this bill that's missing.

While I have the opportunity, once again, I just want to give a shout-out to the member from Nickel Belt for the amazing work that she has done for so many years, bringing all of these important bills to the floor. It just shows that if you stay at it, if you work hard, things will actually one day get done. The Liberals will decide one day to pick it up and know that it's the right thing to do for the people of Ontario.

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

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I'm pleased to rise before the House to speak about the importance of Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act. I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the member from Davenport.

This bill, if passed, would be a critical step to strengthen our Smoke-Free Ontario Act and curb the use of harmful tobacco products by all Ontarians. The detrimental effects of tobacco are well-documented. We

know that tobacco is an extremely addictive substance that has been shown to cause a variety of diseases, like mouth disease, lung cancer, heart disease and emphysema.

Given the serious and harmful effects of tobacco, I'm pleased to see our government taking action to reduce youth exposure to tobacco products. The proposed act is looking to ban all flavoured tobacco, including menthols. Approximately 18,500 young Ontarians in grades 9 to 12 use menthol tobacco products. According to a survey of Canadian youth, one in four high school students reported smoking a menthol cigarette in the past 30 days.

We are deeply concerned by this trend because research has shown that flavoured tobacco products are a gateway to tobacco use and addiction for our youth. This is largely because menthol's cooling effect can reduce the harsh taste of tobacco, making it more tolerable for new smokers and making youth more likely to become habitual smokers. This is why our government is proposing to include menthol in its ban on the sale of flavoured tobacco.

The proposed legislation would also strengthen our Smoke-Free Ontario Act by increasing penalties for selling tobacco to kids, making them the highest in Canada, and strengthening enforcement to test for tobacco use in indoor public places.

While we move forward, we are giving retailers the time to plan. Should this bill pass, tobacco retailers and distributors will have until January 1, 2016, to comply with the ban on flavoured tobacco.

Over the last several years, our government has taken several steps to toughen the tobacco laws, ban smoking in public places and encourage more Ontarians to quit altogether. I would say this is for the overall enjoyment of various environments by everyone. We know that many smokers start smoking when they are young, so the best way to curb tobacco is to prevent people from starting in the first place.

Lately, we are seeing the use of e-cigarettes growing in Ontario, and there are concerns about the possible health effects of these e-cigarette uses. At this time, there is limited research on the effectiveness of e-cigarettes to help people quit smoking. This act will help regulate these products. The act would take important steps, such as a ban on the sale and supply of e-cigarettes to anyone under the age of 19 and banning the display and promotion of e-cigarettes in places where e-cigarettes and tobacco products are sold. It would also prohibit the use of e-cigarettes in certain places where smoking of tobacco is prohibited, such as enclosed workplaces and enclosed public areas.

Speaker, we know that the foundations of a healthy lifestyle are built in childhood. The healthier our kids are, the less likely they are to develop a chronic disease later in life. Indeed, these are preventive strategies we're talking about. In order for our parents and children to make healthy choices, they need to be informed about the food that they are eating. This legislation will make it easier for families to make informed, healthy food choices.

I actually agree with the member opposite when she talked about coming from a family where you eat what's on your plate. That was certainly the rule in my household as laid down by my parents. It actually forced you to be very thoughtful about what you were putting on your plate. Our government is proposing menu labelling legislation. If the legislation passes, Ontario will be the first province in Canada to legislate menu labelling, which will help people make informed choices when eating out or purchasing takeout meals.

This legislation was developed following consultations with the food industry, the health sector, and parents, and, if passed, would require calories for food and beverages, including alcohol, to be posted on menus and menu boards in restaurants, convenience stores, grocery stores and other food premises with 20 or more locations in Ontario. It would require food service operators to post a contextual statement that would help to educate patrons about their daily caloric requirements, and it would authorize public health inspectors to enforce menu labelling requirements. This bill will ensure that Ontarians have the information to make informed choices for their health. I encourage the members from all sides of the House to support this bill.

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

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act. We know that healthy kids grow up to be healthy adults and that if we can work with our kids to be healthy when they are young, they are less likely to have chronic diseases and health problems when they grow up. That's obviously better for the individual child. It is, quite frankly, better for society, because then we have less demands on our health care system.

Looking at that, our government set up the Healthy Kids Panel, and the Healthy Kids Panel was charged with making some recommendations in areas that would help our kids to be more healthy. They came up with three different areas of focus.

The first was the healthy start, and by this we're looking at strategies to support healthy pregnancy and the early years to build the foundation for a healthy childhood and beyond.

They talked about healthy, active communities and making sure our children are more physically active, and certainly my ministry, at education, has a role to play in that. We're looking at how our kids can be more active not just in school but in areas associated with school.

The third area was the area that this act addresses, in part: the healthy food area. We need to make sure that our kids and their families—because often it's the family choosing the food—are making healthy choices around food. It's interesting. When we look at menu labelling and the food that you buy commercially in restaurants, we have this increasing trend of Canadians eating out, particularly at chain restaurants, when we're talking about young kids, and buying more prepared foods from grocery and convenience stores.

1730

What a survey found was that 60% of Canadians eat out once or more a week and that Ontarians lead among other jurisdictions in eating out. So we eat out more than other Canadians. In fact, 20% of us buy our lunches three or more times a week; that is to say, instead of preparing our own lunch, we buy it from somebody else.

That's where this legislation comes in: the menu labelling. What the legislation will require is that, in restaurants, the menus will have to be posted—or on the menu card you get if you are being served at your seat—and that they will actually have to have calorie counts.

This applies to chains that have 20 or more outlets, because we know if it's a mom-and-pop restaurant and they change the menu constantly, and they have no way of counting the calories in tonight's menu, we know that that would be an unreasonable demand on small restaurants. But when we get to big chains, we know that the food preparation is very much controlled by the chain—it's repeated; it doesn't matter whether you go to this outlet or that outlet, you're getting the same thing—so they can provide the calorie count.

We consulted with restaurants, food services and the retail sector, and have legislation here that we believe is quite workable for the restaurant sector. It was interesting; earlier this afternoon the member for Chatham–Kent–Essex was talking about doughnuts and muffins at a chain. We found out some information that would be very useful to my husband, which is that a maple dip doughnut has less calories and less fat than a muffin. Now, it happens that he really likes maple dip doughnuts and isn't such a big fan of muffins, so he, for one, will be very pleased to hear this information.

But the other thing that the legislation will require, beyond the actual labelling of the calories and the fat in the individual item, is actually some information that puts it in context—how many calories do you need a day, how much fat do you need a day—so that you can get a sense of, “If I eat this thing, it's just a little bit of my daily requirements,” or, “My goodness, if I eat this, it's all the fat I need today and tomorrow.” People, if they're given the opportunity to know what they're eating, make better choices, and this legislation will help them do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the previous speakers for their comments on Bill 45, and begin by thanking our minister for bringing this legislation forward and the previous minister, I know, who did a great deal of work on this as well in terms of getting it into the Legislature.

I was just saying to my colleagues who are still sitting with us here this afternoon that this is good policy. This is a good piece—there has been a tremendous amount of work that has gone into bringing this forward. I think that as a group, we can be very proud of the work that we're doing. It's not the kind of legislation, I don't think, that gets too much publicity, and does not last long in the public domain—and that's unfortunate, because there is much in here that is very good and very great.

I want to begin by giving a bit of a shout-out to my home community of Thunder Bay. Contained within Bill 45 here, the Making Healthier Choices Act, are pieces of legislation that deal with smoking, work that we've done previously and work that we will continue to do on a go-forward basis.

I was a member of city council from 1997 to 2003 in Thunder Bay. I'm not sure if we were the first community in the province, but we were one of the first, at that time, that brought forward our own local bylaw to deal with smoking and prohibitions around smoking. How fast time goes by; you think back to 1997 and 2003. As a community, the city of Thunder Bay has a lot to be proud of. We were very progressive, when you think about it, because it has been subsequent to that that the province has come on board. Again, I'm not sure if other municipalities had done it already or not, but if we weren't the first, in the city of Thunder Bay, to deal with this issue, we were one of the first.

We all know full well what smoking means and how damaging it is to us. We've made great progress. The rates, I think, are in the high teens to the low 20s in terms of the population that continues to smoke. I don't think it's ever been that low.

The challenge, of course, is that there is always a new generation coming forward and the industry is always looking for new ways to incent and entice that new generation to become smokers. So the work, when it comes to smoking, never ends.

I remember my grandfather on my mother's side very well. He was a wonderful man, a great man. He loved kids. He loved spending time with us, his grandchildren. We lost him to lung cancer in 1972, I believe it was, at a ridiculously young age. But he was a long-term smoker, and that was directly the result of his habit. So anything that we can do to continue to work with people—I will say that I probably didn't have a fully evolved attitude on smoking when I was younger. I smoked when I was 15 years old; I quit when I was about 21 or 22. I used to think that you just needed to suck it up and do it, and that if you couldn't quit smoking then it was you who couldn't do it. I really didn't buy in enough to the addiction part of it, I would say.

I remember having a discussion with a colleague of mine one time when I was working in Thunder Bay, and I said, "Look, just do it. You can do it," and the person was very offended because it was that person's father that we were talking about. He had been a 50- or 60-year smoker. I said, "He can do it." But I wasn't really open enough to the idea that people really were strongly addicted to it and that they did need help.

We have done some things that I think make it easier for them to quit. I've used up enough of my time on smoking, Speaker.

I do want to talk just a little bit, before I turn it over to my colleague, about the childhood obesity part. There are measures, I know, that are contained in here and the Healthy Kids Panel.

We all grew up—at least my generation; I'm closing in on 60 years old already—a certain way. Your parents

kicked you outside at 8 o'clock and they called you in at 6 o'clock. Maybe you got dinner and maybe you didn't. Maybe you didn't want dinner. You were outside. You were playing. We grew up in a very different way.

I try not to be critical, and I don't think I am, of this generation or the subsequent generations of kids who tend to be indoors more and playing with gadgets that we didn't have when we grew up. I try to remind myself that if we had grown up with those toys, maybe we would have done exactly the same things that they're doing now.

We've got an epidemic on our hands when it comes to childhood obesity. We know that when you have a problem when you're young, you tend to carry that forward with you into your adult years. Anything that we can do to bring a focus back to those issues, to educate people or provide them with tools that are going to make it easier for them to make appropriate choices, I think, serves us all very well. We need to do that.

I link that little story back to the piece on menu labelling that we're doing. I know that the previous speaker, the Minister of Education, talked about how we're only doing this where you have 20 or more locations. We're sensitive to the fact that the smaller operators might have some challenges around us doing that, but it's a good piece. It's in the long-term interest of so many people. I think that those who maybe feel a bit aggrieved by this now will, five, 10, 15 years from now, start to see the benefit.

I grew up in a small family corner store, and I could tell you stories about how easy it was for me to be tempted, at 11 o'clock at night when my parents had gone to bed, to sneak into the cooler to grab a couple of sticks of pepperoni before I went to bed, but I don't have enough time. I've got to turn it over to my colleague. I'll save that story for another time.

Thank you, Speaker. It's great legislation, and it's well-timed and necessary.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise here this afternoon to speak on Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act. I want to thank the previous speakers before me.

Earlier today in the House I had the opportunity to talk about a fantastic organization in my riding of Davenport, FoodShare, which, for over 30 years, has had its doors open to increase access to healthy food and food education in our province.

I recently attended their eighth annual Great Big Crunch. That afternoon we had numerous students joining us at that particular event, and the students not only enjoyed some delicious Ontario produce, but also participated in many hands-on food literacy activities and learned the importance of making healthy eating choices.

It is truly very important for every one of us to make healthy eating choices in order to lead better and more fulfilling lives. The Minister of Health is committed to keeping Ontarians healthy, and that's why we are putting

this bill forward. We know that healthy kids grow up to be healthy adults, and a healthy start is better for our kids and it's better for our health care system.

I know that in my own home with my two young boys I try the best that I can to make those home-made meals whenever I can get home in time to make them. If not, then I know that my mother is at home making them for my children and they're being raised the way I was: with the food grown in the garden.

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Interestingly enough, my eldest, who is 10, actually does not like junk food and refuses to attend various fast-food restaurants—some of them have been referenced here. He refuses because he likes to eat healthy and drinks waters and loves his soup and his vegetables.

It's raising these kids healthy that will lead to there being less likelihood of them developing chronic disease later in life. That's why the Ontario government constructed the Healthy Kids Panel. They provided us with invaluable advice, and we are moving forward on many of the panel's recommendations, including around healthy eating choices for our kids.

In order for us, as parents, and the children to make healthy food choices, we need to be informed about the food that we are eating. Our government is committed to this healthy way of life and has reintroduced legislation which will make it easier for families to make informed and healthy food choices and give them the right information at the right place at the right time.

Oftentimes, when I go into my local grocery store, I see lots of people picking up their cans and their boxed foods and whatever it is to read the labels. It's important now that we are provided with this opportunity, as consumers, when we do go out to have a family meal, to have that on the menus in the restaurants.

That's why we have proposed this to take place. It would require restaurants or any type of convenience store, grocery store or fast-food service premise that has 20 or more locations, as has already been said here, to post all the calories on their menus and on their menu boards. We did consult with the restaurant and food service and retail sectors on this to help us design and implement this menu labelling legislation, which will help parents keep their children healthy.

Mr. Speaker, it has given me great pleasure to speak on this. I know I am running out of time. I just hope that there continues to be support for this bill moving forward.

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

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to speak to Bill 45, which I support. I think it's a very worthy bill.

I will speak to the part of labelling food with the interest of trying to have our children eat better so they can grow up to be adults with better eating habits and therefore healthier people.

The heart and stroke people were in to see me today, as they have been in to see many people. They have some

excellent literature. I'm going to quote from some of their documents right here.

They talk about restricting marketing to kids of some of these larger fast-food chains so they get in their minds that that's what they want to eat. When they talk to mommy and daddy, of course, they say, "That's where I have to go to get my little toy with my food," as I heard the Minister of Labour speak about earlier. I've been there, done that with my kids, and I have a grandson probably going down the same road.

The level of marketing or advertising on television and even on computers and iPhones is very intense, very effective. They tell us at the Heart and Stroke Foundation that the average child spends seven hours and 48 minutes a day on a screen, whether it's a computer, an iPhone or a television, and up to six times per hour they would see an advertisement encouraging them to eat these fast foods that often are not the healthiest food for them.

According to the heart and stroke people, since 1978, obesity in Canadian children has tripled, and 31% of Canadian children are overweight or obese. The most effective way to reduce that, or that demand in the minds of children to want that kind of food, is to restrict the advertising, as they have done in Quebec, where they have outlawed or banned through legislation these kinds of advertisements to children. They did that in 1980, and they dropped fast-food consumption by 13%, which leads to healthier children. So that is a goal that I think we should all be aiming for in the long run, which is beyond this bill and, I would say, a noble goal to shoot for.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, it was good to listen to the government debating on this bill, and obviously they are in support of it.

One member had referenced—some of us are younger; some of us are a more mature generation—about the food on your plate. I never bought into that when my parents said, "You have to eat all the food on your plate." What I did is, I took less, and I went back for more. When I raised my kids, I always put less on their plates, and my parents would say, "They're going to starve. You've got to give them more food." I said, "Don't worry. If they're hungry, they'll go back for more." I tried to instill good eating habits about portions and what you eat right from a young age.

For myself, I come from a Portuguese culture, and food is celebrated all the time. At every event there are exorbitant amounts of food and desserts, and it's an indulgence, sometimes, when people get together with food.

It's really important to do that in your own life as well as the calorie count that we're talking about. It's really important to know what's in your food, and how many calories there are. We talked about the sodium piece that's lacking in this bill. Those things are part of the nutritional value in food.

All of us are on a very busy schedule. When I'm enjoying a meal, I personally like to get as much nutritional

value out of that meal as I can. Speaker, you know that. You and I have dined out, and you're well aware of my healthy appetite.

It's good to see that there's going to be calorie counts in this bill. It's fair to say that if you have a franchise of 20 or more restaurants, you should be labelling your menus and showing the calorie count. I think that's good. Also, watching our children, trying to get them on board and educating them at home as well as when they go out to eat is very important.

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

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm pleased to rise in the House in support of Bill 45.

I would like to segue on what the member from London–Fanshawe was saying. I grew up in a different family, where food was really important. One of the concerns was always, “Have you eaten enough?” That's what you hear from your parents. That's what you hear from your grandparents. I'm of an Italian background, so “Have you eaten enough?” is also what I say to my kids.

But at the same time, it is important to avoid child obesity, and this bill is really about the next generation and about making sure that we have healthy kids who will turn into healthy adults, and that will lead to healthy families and healthy communities. We all have to learn to make healthy choices in what we eat and also everything that we take into our bodies. This is one of the reasons why I support the menu labelling that this bill proposes.

This bill also proposes more restrictions on smoking and on e-cigarettes. I grew up in the 1970s, and that was a different era. My teachers and my professors smoked. My doctor smoked. We had ads advertising cigarettes. It was a different time. We didn't know all the harmful effects of smoking as we know them today. It would be irresponsible of us not to think of the future generation and spare them, perhaps, from what happened to many of our generation who did become addicted by smoking and, like the member from Hamilton Mountain, had to go through a great effort in order to quit. I hope to get there someday.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: All this talk about food is making me hungry.

I did want to comment on the speech from the Associate Minister of Finance, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the member from Davenport on Bill 45.

I met earlier today with the Heart and Stroke Foundation. They were lobbying to ban advertising to kids 13 or under and pointing out that the sedentary lifestyle, now that there's so much face time in front of various devices—they said that young people are sedentary for eight hours a day.

But I do think it's all about balance. A book I'm reading right now is *The Big Fat Surprise*. I was pleased to learn so far, about a third of the way through the book, that saturated fat is not necessarily bad for you—because I like things that have saturated fat in them.

But it is about balance for sure. I'm learning from the book that basically, as we've gone to no fat in everything from 1960 on, we've gone to things like complex carbohydrates and sugar and more processed foods, which may actually be worse. So I think it is certainly about balance. Obviously, a balanced diet, including some saturated fat—and also, for all of us, getting a lot more exercise can go a long way as well.

1750

Also, there's no question that we should be trying to stop smoking. I met recently with the convenience store operators, and they question the wisdom of banning menthol cigarettes and worry about the contraband market, because that is an area that hasn't been addressed. Almost 50% of the cigarettes and tobacco products sold in the province are contraband. That's certainly something that I know the government has talked about addressing but needs to do a better job on. Quebec has had a little bit more success; they've reduced contraband by 15%—I see I'm out of time. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Associate Minister of Finance has two minutes.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I think we've had a very healthy debate this afternoon. I want to thank all the members for their comments. I want to thank the Minister of Education, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the member from Davenport, the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills, the member from London–Fanshawe, the member from York South–Weston and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I think everyone has talked about the importance and the significance of Bill 45 and the impact that it will have on families and on children. One of the aspects I really liked was what the member was saying about advertising and reminding people about what to eat. I know that one of the tips that I heard for parents is, simply put out the good choices; if you have them visible, children and family members will actually take the time to have that apple or carrot stick versus a sugary or salty snack.

I think my colleague from Thunder Bay certainly has reminded me of my own riding of Scarborough–Guildwood and the wonderful food culture in the community. It's a place that has people from many, many different backgrounds and diverse communities who have set up businesses. We've actually just been recognized by the *Toronto Star* as one of the best places for food. So I encourage you all to explore the food culture in Scarborough and to try some of the great diverse cuisines that are there. I think that with great, smart legislation like Bill 45, we're going to have even better choices for our families moving forward.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's my privilege to rise today and speak to Bill 45, An Act to enhance public health by enacting the Healthy Menu Choices Act, 2014 and the Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2014 and by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act.

First of all, I'd like to say that I'm supporting this legislation because I think there's a real need for it. But I

think we could certainly do much better. I'm looking forward to amendments that might do that. Plus we're hoping the government will go even further.

As I say, I think it could be much better, especially when you're looking at getting real results. We know that the regulations that we're seeing lately are not having any real impact and that the changes that were supposed to lower the current levels of obesity just aren't working—we're seeing obesity rates going through the roof—and youth smoking levels are remaining stubbornly high. We know that the one bright light that's actually helping people quit, e-cigarettes, is being further regulated.

I'll break Bill 45 down into the three components. The first one enacts healthy menu choices. The high obesity rates in today's society in Canada is alarming, and it's a record that we share with most of the industrial world. I struggle with my weight, and it makes me appreciate the people who struggle with their weight—as well as trying to stop smoking. It's tough for most of us. The battle requires a change in lifestyle.

Since the new year, I've struggled through diets, my favourite being the fat-burning soup, and have been down as much as 15 pounds but quickly back up. It's an up-and-down fight, and it's not something that's easy, especially when you look at the course that we're on here. You're constantly on the road, and the job requires that you're always attending a fundraiser. It's not unusual on a Saturday morning to attend a couple of breakfasts—the odd time, three—and a couple of lunches, and of course there's usually a Friday- or Saturday-night large-dinner fundraiser that you're expected to be at. It always is a struggle. Then you throw in a week when you're trying to get away, and you're back up to where you started, most times.

When I was growing up on a small mixed dairy farm in the 1960s, the diet we had was pretty simple, especially when you figure in the lack of meat on Fridays. We had lots of bread, lots of beef, milk, potatoes and macaroni, but we all seemed to be able to eat endlessly and never put on weight. We got home from school and we could go through more than a loaf of bread—I had three brothers about the same age and a couple of sisters. Then you go out and do the chores, and come back for supper and you'd eat again. Young farm boys: We're big eaters.

In those days, my dad had to deal with the local baker in Dalhousie Mills. For two dollars, you'd get 30 loaves of bread a week, and we usually ran out before the week was over. Obviously those were the days of lower energy rates than this Liberal government's, which is a good thing, because there wasn't a lot of money around. I remember seeing a milk cheque in the spring of the year—somewhere around \$7 a week—so my mom had to be creative, but living on the farm we always had lots of food to eat. I think my mom's favourite saying was, "It's not a restaurant," so if you didn't like what they had or if you were late, there was always lots of peanut butter in the cupboard.

Back to today's obesity. I believe the calorie-counter idea is an excellent one, and one that we must work on,

but it must be followed up with education: what are the recommended calorie intake rates and what impact does exercise have on it—not to mention the increased exercise in our schools that we aren't seeing. There's no mention of educating our children or managing their diet and exercise. Really, it has to become a habit. I think that's what we've got to see. But children have to know just why they're making sacrifices and what's really going to be there. People must be educated on the basis of how exercise and food impact their weight and general health, and all the benefits that go along with that. If you just make it harder, our children will use their resources—and they're resourceful—just to beat the system.

I don't agree with the practice today of just banning certain supposed "bad foods" from our schools, because without the proper lessons, the students just walk down the street to the local restaurant and pig out on the foods that we're trying to make it very difficult for them to get. At our local high school, if there's a school trip, there are not enough children for the cafeteria to operate and they close it down. Not only are we encouraging the children to go down the street to get the food they want, but the children who will eat in the cafeteria have no place to eat. Really, there's a practice that's not working, because we have to make it practical and we have to look at the results. With people on low incomes spending money on the wrong foods, education is really the key. People have to be selective, and they have to be able to do so when they're struggling.

It's the same thing in the bigger schools in Cornwall. It's a rural area, but when you look at the local restaurants, they're lined up at noontime. The only positive thing is that the kids are walking a couple of blocks down the street to the restaurant. Fortunately, sometimes they'll cross the street. It's easy to see that it's not working. Calories are an important first step, but we must educate our children on the right foods, and we must make it a habit and work with them to make the right choice.

Poverty also impacts people's choices. Good and healthy foods are expensive, and even more so as this government has driven up costs over the last 12 years. There's less money, with hydro bills, property taxes etc., to buy food. More and more people are taking to community soup kitchens, and this is the wrong direction. The percentage of people on minimum wage is up dramatically in this province. We need good-paying jobs and competitive policies that will attract the good, high-paying jobs that we've seen disappear over the last number of years.

Next I'll talk about cigarettes. It's clear that today's methods, again, aren't working. As with everywhere in Ontario, contraband cigarettes are heavily in eastern Ontario.

I guess we'll finish off there for the day. Thank you for the time, Speaker.

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

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

HOUSING SERVICES CORP.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Oxford has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given today on the HSC tenants' insurance program by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

The member from Oxford.

1800

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Earlier today, I asked the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing about the fact that tenants in social housing are being overcharged for tenant insurance because of a kickback to the Housing Services Corp. The minister didn't even address the tenant insurance program in his answer.

I want to be clear why I was dissatisfied with the minister's answer: not just because he didn't know about the kickback, but because he didn't even say he would look into it. He seemed more worried about his government's reputation than whether someone was taking advantage of tenants in social housing.

I hope the minister has changed his approach, that he used the last six hours to not only look at this kickback but to contact HSC and solve it. I hope he's going to tell us that his government has taken action instead of standing by and allowing this organization to take advantage of tenants in social housing.

Housing Services Corp. has been pushing housing providers to make tenant insurance mandatory, and most tenants are only being told about HSC's tenant insurance. The insurance company, the broker, and the general managing agency who are doing the work are getting paid, but tenants are also paying 5% more to go into HSC's pocket. That means that tenants who are struggling to make ends meet are paying 5% more for insurance than they should—5% of every premium paid by social housing tenants. Think about how much that would add up to, and it's going to Housing Services Corp., a company that isn't actually insuring the tenants, isn't the broker, and doesn't even operate the website where they buy the insurance.

Most people have never even heard of Housing Services Corp. It was founded in 2002 with two staff and a budget of about a million dollars. The goal was to save social housing providers money by negotiating bulk purchases of natural gas and insurance. As the minister acknowledged earlier this week, it was an idea that was good. However, over the last few years, there have been numerous problems at HSC—questionable deals, European trips and fancy meals.

Until 2006, the budget for staff salaries was a little over a million dollars, but then the staffing budget spiralled to \$7.5 million in six years and no one in the government seemed to notice: \$7.5 million that was intended for social housing. That's just one example of their questionable spending.

Earlier this week, I rose and asked the Premier about HS 497 Ltd., a company that Housing Services Corp. invested in according to their own 2010 financial statements. I hope the minister will be addressing this during his remarks as well.

The corporate address of HS 497 Ltd. turns out to be a lawyer's office in Manchester, England. It appears that the company never actually became active or operated, but they did get over \$30,000 of Ontario's affordable housing money. I want to make it clear to the minister: Your review only covers the last two years. It won't look into the money that went to HS 497. It won't look into the million dollars that went to Innoserv Solar. The only way to have those problems investigated properly is to call in the auditor.

Mr. Speaker, it's bad enough that taxpayer dollars are being wasted, but this is impacting the people who need social housing. There are 165,000 families waiting for affordable housing. That's 40,000 more than when this government was elected. Municipalities are reporting that buying through Housing Services Corp. is costing them money that could be used to provide homes for those families.

Peel region reported they are spending an extra \$182,000 in one year because they are forced to purchase natural gas from HSC. That would have provided housing for 30 families.

Hamilton reported spending an extra \$1.1 million on natural gas because of HSC. That's housing for 140 families.

Oxford county estimates that HSC costs them about \$100,000 every year. They say that's housing for 25 families.

Minister, we are hearing from municipalities large and small that Housing Services Corp. isn't saving them money; it's costing them money.

I hope the minister has used the last six hours to look into the problems at HSC. I hope he will be reporting to us that he has contacted them and asked them to lower the price of tenant insurance instead of taking kickbacks. I hope he will agree to call in the auditor so we can sort out those problems and make sure that affordable housing money goes where it's intended: to help vulnerable people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has five minutes.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Speaker, the Housing Services Corp. is an independent, non-profit corporation originally established under the Social Housing Reform Act, 2000, and continued under the Housing Services Act, 2011. I think the member opposite is familiar with the Social Housing Reform Act, as he was a member of the PC government at the time and voted in favour of the legislation.

The Housing Services Corp. is mandated to provide certain vital and valued services centrally, and with a goal to reduce costs and improve efficiencies to the housing providers accessing them. I've said it before and I'll say it again: The pooling of resources to benefit housing providers across Ontario was the one thing the PCs got right, when they created the Housing Services Corp.

Here's a couple of quotes, and I quote directly. From the general manager of the Peel Housing Corp.: "I am writing to express my full endorsement for" HSC. "HSC works for us housing providers by leveraging our combined buying power in the private market, making sure we get the best deals.... HSC ensures that both small and large affordable housing providers in Ontario continue to be viable."

But more important than that, as a government that is committed to openness and transparency, we believe that accountable, fiscally responsible policies are critical. That is why, in 2011, under the Housing Services Act, our government reformed the legislation that governs HSC. We fixed gaps in accountability and transparency that the member and former government forgot to legislate in 2000. As a result of our reforms, HSC is required to provide an annual report to me, as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, including audited financial statements, within 180 days of the end of the fiscal year.

HSC efficiently serves central functions such as bulk purchasing of natural gas and insurance, and in so doing benefits clients and saves them money.

With respect to insurance, HSC ensures that every provider, no matter its size and risk profile, is able to access insurance. This insurance pertains to the provider, not tenants. HSC's insurance program assures providers of continuity of coverage, even in the event of catastrophic loss by the provider; for example, as a result of fire or flood. In short, the needs of the many are served over the needs of the few or the one, and that benefits all municipal housing program providers.

Here's another quote, from the CEO of Nipissing District Housing Corp.: "As a manager of a small to

medium-sized social housing provider, the Housing Services Corp. has provided us with services that we have neither the finances nor the expertise to acquire on our own; services such as natural gas bulk purchasing ... for price and budget stability...."

While I recognize that the board operates independently, HSC was created by provincial legislation, and the people of Ontario have a right to be confident that public dollars are being spent wisely. So back in the fall, when I became aware of some of the questionable reimbursement and compensation practices, I wrote to the board chair, reaffirming the government's expectation—long before it was raised by the member opposite, by the way—that the corporation use good judgment and ensure every dollar is spent wisely and efficiently.

In response to my letter, the HSC board revised its remuneration and expense policies in line with the Management Board of Cabinet's directives. As part of the HSC's commitment to be more open, transparent and accountable, the corporation asked the ministry to help facilitate an independent, third-party review of itself and its subsidiaries. I expect that review will be finished later this spring.

The member has had much to say about the Housing Services Corp. He knows about the value that they bring, and I encourage the member opposite to be accurate when he speaks about HSC. For example, on several occasions, the member has made statements implying HSC is wasting public funds that would otherwise go towards affordable housing. This is simply not true. There are no public funds here. This is an independent, self-financed, non-profit corporation.

My ministry is going to facilitate the independent review. When we have the results, I want to be very clear: If that necessitates further actions, I will certainly take them. Until that happens, I will not be stampeded by wild accusations and unfounded assumptions.

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

This House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1810.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiques, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
		Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Vacant
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Bas Balkissoon, Chris Ballard
Grant Crack, Cheri DiNovo
Han Dong, Michael Harris
Randy Hillier, Sophie Kiwala
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Présidente: Soo Wong
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Peter Z. Milczyn
Laura Albanese, Yvan Baker
Victor Fedeli, Catherine Fife
Ann Hoggarth, Monte McNaughton
Peter Z. Milczyn, Daiene Vernile
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
Mike Colle, Grant Crack
Joe Dickson, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Sophie Kiwala
Eleanor McMahon, Lisa M. Thompson
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: John Fraser
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Cristina Martins
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Wayne Gates, Marie-France Lalonde
Harinder Malhi, Cristina Martins
Jim McDonell, Randy Pettapiece
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
Jack MacLaren, Michael Mantha
Cristina Martins, Indira Naidoo-Harris
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qadri
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tamara Pomanski

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Toby Barrett
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Granville Anderson, Bas Balkissoon
Chris Ballard, Toby Barrett
Garfield Dunlop, Eleanor McMahon
Laurie Scott, Jagmeet Singh
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Julia Munro, Arthur Potts
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Présidente: Indira Naidoo-Harris
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Kathryn McGarry
Robert Bailey, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Jennifer K. French, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Kathryn McGarry
Indira Naidoo-Harris, Daiene Vernile
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Vic Dhillon
Christine Elliott, Marie-France Lalonde
Amrit Mangat, Gila Martow
Kathryn McGarry, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment /
Comité spécial de la violence et du harcèlement à caractère
sexuel**

Chair / Présidente: Daiene Vernile
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Han Dong, Randy Hillier
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
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