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**Journal
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Thursday 3 March 2016

Jeudi 3 mars 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Thursday 3 March 2016

Jeudi 3 mars 2016

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S
FIRST RESPONDERS ACT
(POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS
DISORDER), 2016

LOI DE 2016 D'APPUI
AUX PREMIERS INTERVENANTS
DE L'ONTARIO (ÉTAT DE STRESS
POST-TRAUMATIQUE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 23, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 163, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with respect to posttraumatic stress disorder / Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail et la Loi sur le ministère du Travail relativement à l'état de stress post-traumatique.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? Further debate? Last call for further debate.

Mr. Flynn has moved second reading of Bill 163, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder. Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This will be deferred to after question period today.

Second reading vote deferred.

2016 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2016

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: First, I'll be splitting my time with the great member from Leeds–Grenville. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 173, the budget measures act or, as the government likes to call it, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act.

Mr. Speaker, I read the title because that's exactly where I want to start today, the jobs of today and tomor-

row. Before I do that, it's important not to forget the jobs of the past. There are more than 350,000 manufacturing jobs lost under this government—the thousands of people working in the mining and forestry sectors in the north, or the thousands of nurses and health care workers let go because of the negligent freeze on hospital spending.

Even within that context, the government has the nerve to table a budget talking about jobs of today and tomorrow. But let's look at the jobs of today. I direct your attention to page 247 of the budget document, Mr. Speaker. There it shows the newly adjusted job creation forecasts for the coming year. This budget revealed that the province will see 76,000 fewer jobs—fewer jobs—created between 2015 and 2019 than they thought last year. Further, page 246 reads “weaker-than-expected employment growth” until 2019.

Ce n'est pas seulement que moins d'emplois seront créés, c'est la perte d'emplois qui existent déjà.

The Ontario Retirement Pension Plan is slated to force 54,000 Ontarians to lose their jobs in the next few years. That's not fear mongering, Mr. Speaker. That's straight from the Ministry of Finance's own internal documents.

Que ce soit le Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario, le nouveau système de plafonnement et d'échange qui prend de l'argent, dont je parlerai bientôt, ou les hausses des frais d'énergie, la vie est plus difficile sous ce gouvernement, et il pousse les emplois hors de la province.

The budget may be called Jobs for Today and Tomorrow, but it's really a clever way of saying that jobs that exist today won't tomorrow.

It is that very concern that I have for workers and families in Ontario that brings me to our party's three budget asks.

Ce sont des simples demandes que nous pensons que les gens de l'Ontario méritent de voir dans le budget mais que le gouvernement a choisi d'ignorer.

(1) Include a credible plan to make energy more affordable and to stop the fire sale of Hydro One.

(2) Stop the damaging cuts to our health care system in this province and properly manage health care.

(3) Include a credible plan—not a stretch goal, a credible plan—to balance the budget, including immediate action to pay down the debt; a debt, I remind you, of a staggering \$308 billion.

But, when the Minister of Finance was asked what he thought about these three budget asks, he said, “That's quite a fiscal fantasy world.” I don't think an Ontario where residents can afford to pay their hydro bills is a fantasy world. I don't think a properly funded health care

system, and a properly managed health care system to boot, is an impossible task for this government. And I surely don't think a balanced budget is lunacy.

We asked for a credible plan to make energy more affordable; instead, we got \$2 a month worth of energy rebates coming from the cap-and-trade money collected from the very people who will get the rebate. It's a classic bait and switch—not to mention the fact that hydro bills went up roughly \$100 January 1. This new rebate won't even cover the last Liberal hydro hike. That's not a credible plan.

We asked for a properly managed health care system. We've continued to say that the Liberal government's history of scandal, waste and mismanagement is taking funds away from essential services. This budget is no exception. This budget fails to reverse current and planned cuts to doctors, nurses and hospitals, all at the expense of patients. Not only are there no plans for more funding for long-term-care beds, which could help manage the system better, or for restoring funding for physiotherapy for seniors when we've seen falls spike at long-term-care facilities, but this budget also makes medication more unaffordable for most seniors.

We asked for a credible plan when it comes to dealing with having a balanced budget. Budget 2016 is simply a laughable response to that demand. They took \$850 million out of the rainy day contingency fund to reduce the deficit. Over \$1.1 billion was taken from the Hydro One revenue, which, by the way, the government had said again and again was for infrastructure. And the one-time \$2.6-billion departure tax on the Hydro One sale was used against the deficit, despite the fact that the government said a hundred times that it was being used for infrastructure.

0910

Mr. Speaker, the future plan needs better planning. We need a government that sees the big picture. The government claims they're on track to balance the budget by 2017-18, but they also claim that they'll bring in \$4 billion more in revenue than the Financial Accountability Officer said was even possible under best case scenarios. Let me stress that: The office that the government created to verify their figures so the public can have confidence in their figures—that independent oversight—is saying that their numbers are wrong. It is saying that the government's numbers are \$4 billion rosier in revenue than they should be. That should be astonishing to everyone in Ontario, because it says that the government's numbers don't add up. And if I'm going to trust someone—the Financial Accountability Officer, a non-partisan oversight office, or the Minister of Finance, who has a history of making mistakes on his numbers—I'm going to trust the Financial Accountability Officer.

This budget is simply another Liberal tax-and-grab. The budget forecasts an additional \$3 billion in tax revenue alone: \$1.9 billion in personal income taxes, \$700 million in corporate taxes and \$500 million through cap and trade. Doesn't this government ever get tired of imposing new taxes and taking more from Ontarians? If

the tax increases weren't enough, this budget increases virtually every other government service fee. Fees for driver and vehicle licensing are going up. The price of cigarettes and wine will increase. Camping in provincial parks and fishing and hunting licences just got more expensive. Everything from liquor licences to even event permits for charities will cost more. It's that easy: This budget makes life more expensive for everything; this budget makes life harder for Ontario. It's for all these reasons the PC Party has serious problems with this Liberal budget.

Les chiffres ne correspondent pas. C'est de la fumée et des miroirs à son meilleur.

All we requested was a budget that did what Ontarians expect, want and deserve. Ontarians expect a government to look after their tax dollars, not squander them on everything from gas plants to computer systems. Ontarians want a government that makes life more affordable, not harder. And Ontarians deserve to see the whole picture. When I say "the whole picture," I'm referring to the asterisk that hangs over every Liberal promise in this budget.

The Liberal government will tell you that the budget funds for health care are unfrozen, showing that hospitals get \$345 million in new funding, but that's not the whole picture. Hospital budgets have been frozen for the last four years despite more patients—150,000 new patients—and inflation.

Dans ma circonscription de Simcoe-Nord, Orillia Soldiers' Memorial Hospital a dû réduire le nombre de lits de soins continus, éliminer son hôpital de jour gériatrique et couper 20 infirmières à temps plein.

In fact, the Ontario Nurses' Association details that 770 nurses were cut—lost their jobs—by this government in 2015 alone. As a result, patient care is suffering.

But it's not just the past that needs to be discussed. Every give in this budget comes with a take. I'll be very specific about what I mean when I say that every give in this budget comes with a take. The health care take is on page 289—the government wanted to hide it and make sure that no one noticed it. Page 289 quietly shows hospital revenue from gaming—\$107 million that hospitals depended on—gone. The changes to hospital parking: Although providing much relief to patients, and we applaud the help to families, hospitals lose \$28 million. It's just switching envelopes. It's smoke and mirrors.

So when the Liberals say they have increased funding for hospitals by \$345 million, what they're really saying is that they've increased it by \$210 million despite a much more significant demand. While I applaud them for breaking their self-imposed funding freeze on the health care system in Ontario, this is simply a band-aid solution. It's not dealing with the better management that we have been suggesting is needed in the health care system.

Nous avons besoin de plus qu'une solution pansement pour améliorer l'état sombre des soins aux patients dans cette province.

Mr. Speaker, it's not just hospitals that are being duped; it's seniors, too. This budget announces that the

shingles vaccine will be free for those between the ages of 65 and 70. If you're in that age bracket, that's great news; if you're not, too bad. But it's not just age limits that are penalizing seniors in this budget; it's also the ability to pay for their much-needed medications that keep them healthy and out of the hospital. For seniors in the Ontario Drug Benefit Program, their deductible will increase by \$70, nearly double, unless they are low-income. What's low-income to this government? A senior making under \$19,000 is low-income. The notion that a senior making \$19,500 can afford these exorbitant increases in their medications, the fact that this government thinks a senior making \$19,500 is affluent and rich is just ridiculous. The Premier has already acknowledged that this threshold was far too low.

Peut-être que si le gouvernement libéral avait consulté les Ontariens sur le budget, ils auraient réalisé cela plus tôt, mais je vais revenir sur ça plus tard.

Back to seniors, Mr. Speaker: Not only will they have to pay nearly twice what they've been paying now as a deductible but they're also going to have to pay an extra dollar every time they get a prescription filled. Seniors don't have a choice but to take their medication. We're not talking about efficiencies or buzzwords; we're talking about the health of our elderly. Government should be there to take care of those who need our help and make their lives easier, not more unaffordable.

This government claims the shingles vaccine will give some seniors a one-time \$170 savings, but they fail to mention that most seniors will be paying a minimum of \$70 a year more for drugs plus an extra dollar for every prescription. This government has made life harder for the vast, vast majority of seniors.

And it's not just the cost of prescription drugs that is increasing. Seniors are already being hit with high hydro rates, especially those who have more serious conditions that require assistance to help them enjoy life. For example, should a senior who has poor circulation and has to keep their heat up be paying more for that heat? Should a senior with an at-home dialysis machine be paying peak rates? Health care can't be turned on and off whenever it's convenient for the government.

But it's not just energy rates or drug costs, Mr. Speaker. This government took it a step further by cancelling the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit used by seniors to make their homes more accessible. So, sure, some seniors may save \$170 on a free shingles vaccine, but every senior in Ontario will lose on renovations, prescription drugs and energy costs. The moral of the story is: If you're a senior in Ontario, your costs are going up because of this Liberal government.

Comme je le disais plus tôt, chaque chose donnée est livrée avec une « prise ». Ce budget, tout simplement, va rendre la vie plus difficile pour les personnes âgées de l'Ontario.

Whether it's seniors or health care funding, the government isn't telling the whole story. It's the same thing when it comes to the hallmark of their budget 2016: free tuition, as they call it, for students from families with

under \$50,000 in annual income. Mr. Speaker, our party supports increased access to post-secondary institutions, as everyone would. Easier access to education is a noble goal to pursue. The reality is that students in Ontario are already faced with the highest tuition rates in Canada. I repeat, students in Ontario are faced with the highest tuition rates in Canada, and 70%—70%—of the families are not eligible for the full benefit.

While Ontario students should be able to choose a career path that best suits them, there are certainly skills gap challenges needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow, and this government doesn't address it. We must address the skills gap, which is costing Ontario's economy \$24.3 billion a year in forgone revenue and is forcing young Ontarians out of the province to find work.

0920

I read one survey that said 52% of engineering and infrastructure firms have to hire young people from outside Ontario because we don't graduate them here. This government is not willing to have that conversation. How about graduating young people for the jobs that exist in Ontario today?

When I speak about the full picture, whether it be on health care, jobs or deficit reduction, I truly believe the government should have understood the people of Ontario better. And they would have, if they'd actually listened—if the pre-budget consultations weren't simply for show.

This government had the audacity to tour around the province—mind you, on taxpayer dollars—to hear concerns from concerned Ontarians without even waiting for that committee to produce a report on its findings. It's unbelievable that they would use taxpayer dollars to go out and listen, and never bother to let the committee write the report. It's shameful. We all know that this budget had to be written well in advance. After all, it's 340 pages and had to be translated into French. That means that for it to be have been ready on February 25, it would have had to have been completed weeks before.

What about the feedback that this budget should be have been informed by? What about that consultation? This government is slow to act on many issues, yet they're telling us that on the most important document of the year they were unable to reflect and hear the concerns that they said mattered to them—so hypocritical.

C'est évident que ce budget a été imprimé sans les opinions des Ontariens à l'esprit.

I've knocked on countless doors and visited every corner of this province and I've never heard a single Ontarian, in my riding of Simcoe North or elsewhere, say that they want seniors to pay more for prescription drugs. I've never met a single Ontarian who said that they want the government to announce action on the Ring of Fire three separate times but never actually spend a dollar on the project. I've never met a single Ontarian who says that they want our province's debt levels to be beyond \$300 billion. Mr. Speaker, this government is truly out of touch with the people of Ontario.

However, we in the PC caucus are listening to Ontarians relentlessly. In fact, at our convention this weekend, we will be launching our policy process. We plan to go to every corner of the province and listen—not listen for show like the government does, but listen to engage the grassroots, to engage stakeholders, to engage individuals on the front lines. That's what real leadership is about. It's about treating the people of Ontario with respect and attention. It's about taking their concerns to Queen's Park and advocating for the constituents who put you there.

Je suis fier de dire que notre parti prendra en compte les points de vue réels des gens de l'Ontario, pas seulement les vues de quelques initiés libéraux qui veulent prendre soin de leur propre survie politique.

That being said, if I may, I want to go back to the fiscal situation of the province. We have a debt that has eclipsed \$300 billion for the first time in the history of any province in Canada. It's scary—not just Ontario, but any province. In fact, we're the most indebted state or province in the world. It's astonishing. That is their legacy to future generations.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It compromises everything.

Mr. Patrick Brown: It compromises absolutely everything. It takes away our fiscal capacity to support what we care about in health care and education and the environment. We pay roughly \$11.8 billion in interest payments alone. That's almost \$1 billion a month in interest payments. That's more than we spend on our colleges or universities, which are apparently Liberal priorities, but they've removed the ability to support them. It's more than we spend on our children and youth or agriculture. It is 22 times more than we spend on the environment.

We need to get our debt and deficit under control. We need a province that has its fiscal house in order so that we can fully invest in the things that Ontario need—not just band-aid solutions to systemic problems; I'm talking about efforts to improve the errors in the system, to improve our transportation corridors and to create less red tape. We have 354,000 regulations. We are the capital of red tape in Canada.

We need to have affordable energy so we can create an environment where businesses can flourish, where we can create jobs, where if you're an investor, you want to be in Ontario. We can't waste \$11.8 billion a year on one hand and expect to have money to support the services Ontarians need and deserve on the other. When we are wasting that much money a year on interest payments, it's unacceptable. It has left no room—no room—to support the social infrastructure of our province. This province is left with no choice but to turn to new taxes and sources of revenue, and that's what we see in this budget.

Whether it's toll roads on lanes and highways that people and families in Ontario have already paid for, or whether it's the new cap-and-trade cash grab that doesn't even contain guarantees that the money will actually go to reducing emissions, it's getting to be too much. It's not just the income taxes and corporate taxes I referred to earlier that the government is taking more in on; it's increased taxes on a bottle of wine, and the reduction of

several important tax credits—because the notion of giving Ontarians a break is not something this government would entertain.

Specifically on cap and trade, Mr. Speaker, I don't know of anyone who trusts this government to invest \$1.9 billion in emission-reducing technology. They have no track record of raising revenue for the proper purposes. They had the health levy, which was the largest tax in Ontario's history. It didn't go to health care; it didn't go to supporting our hospitals. It went to pay for waste and mismanagement.

Climate change is a serious issue that requires a serious response from the government. There is no question about that. But this government has not presented Ontarians with a credible plan to tackle climate change. It's simply photo op environmentalism. Instead, this cap-and-trade cash grab will finance a new Liberal slush fund that lacks any accountability.

While Ontarians are willing to do their part to reduce emissions, it's wrong of this government to raise money in the name of the environment, taking advantage of Ontarians' goodwill on the environment, goodwill in wanting to tackle climate change, simply to be what they call another revenue tool or, as I call it, a cash grab on the backs of Ontario families.

This is the same government that handed out billions in grants, through the Ministry of Economic Development to businesses to create jobs. But they didn't actually keep track of the jobs; that would get in the way of their slush fund. Many businesses, because of Ontario's skyrocketing hydro rates, had to leave this province with that money in hand, the ones that actually got grants. If they can't hand out money to create jobs properly, why would anyone think they can hand out money to reduce emissions properly? They have no track record on this. They have no one's confidence that they can get this right.

Despite this glaring fact, home heating and gasoline are going up 4.3 cents a litre—which will cost Ontarians \$400 a year and another roughly \$450 a year in home heating costs. That's almost \$900 for the average Ontario family. If we're going to pay this type of money to fight climate change, it had better actually be going to fight climate change.

Needless to say, we in the PC Party have some serious concerns with the Liberal track record. This money cannot—I repeat, cannot—be used to pay for past scandals, whether it's gas plants, eHealth or Ornge. This cannot be a revenue tool to make up for this government's incompetence. We will call the government out on it.

That is what this comes down to: It comes down to trust in this government. Throughout my remarks and throughout this budget, we can see that the people of Ontario do not trust this government to get it right.

In the last few weeks, they realized they built a train storage shed too small and that their airport express train was too expensive for the average Ontarian to afford. Sometimes it's the little things that are indicative of how this government manages our affairs.

But the direction of the province and the 2016 budget is no small thing. This is a critical document. This budget

is too important to trust to a government that has been under investigation by the OPP on four different occasions.

Il est trop important pour faire confiance à un gouvernement rempli de scandales, de gaspillage, et de mauvaise gestion. Il est clair que les libéraux rendront la vie plus difficile pour les gens de l'Ontario.

0930

The PC Party won't stand for that, and they certainly won't stand for a budget that has contents that aren't in the best interest of Ontario.

In closing, I want to return to the title, Jobs for Today and Tomorrow.

Il est clair que la direction des libéraux pour l'Ontario ne mènera pas à une augmentation d'emplois et d'investissements dans cette province.

Why? It's simple. The title of the budget is just like the contents within: It doesn't tell the whole story. This is the budget of smoke and mirrors. The title doesn't tell you everything you need to know. So when the people of Ontario, who are smarter than the government gives them credit for, voice their displeasure with this budget and its programs, we'll be here to listen. We will be here to reflect their frustrations, to reflect on the Liberal mistakes, and to ultimately fix them. That's what real leadership is.

In the meantime, I'd encourage the members opposite to take off their rose-coloured glasses for just a moment and see what this budget really is. Again, the budget may be called the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act, but it's really a clever way of saying that the jobs that exist today won't be here tomorrow if we have more of this government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Merci, monsieur le Président. Bonjour. It's a real privilege for me to rise and share our caucus' lead-off debate on the government's budget motion with my leader, Patrick Brown.

Off the top, I want to commend my leader; my seatmate, the member from Nipissing; and our entire Ontario PC caucus for their work this week on behalf of Ontarians in exposing the government.

The caucus has done a tremendous job showing that there's more to this budget than the headlines the government is trying to spin. I know from my days in the newspaper business that there's always a story beneath the headline. As we've shown, despite the grand pronouncements that this government has made, the real story in the budget is not good news for retired Ontarians on a fixed income. It's not good news for students or the 350,000 people who have lost a manufacturing job on this government's watch, or, quite frankly, for anyone in need of a doctor, or in hope of trying to find improved health care services for a loved one, or families that are desperate to get a break on their hydro bill so they can make ends meet. For every item the government claims is in there to help, there are increased taxes, increased fees and deep service cuts that more than offset any gains.

In the end, a full reading of the budget, beyond its headline of Jobs for Today and Tomorrow, leads to just one conclusion: This government continues to make life more unaffordable for Ontarians.

Frankly, I would argue that Premier Wynne has reached the same conclusion. Well, she has at least with one item in the budget. She's already made a major flip-flop this week on the budget's plan to nearly double the deductible on prescription drugs for most seniors. Perhaps in the finance minister's rush to get the budget to print, even before public consultation was ongoing, the Premier didn't have a chance to actually read the budget. It gives me a new take on that old line that the government likes to use on opposition politicians every year at budget time: I guess the Premier was in favour of the budget before she actually read it.

I can tell you, when I was in the lockup and I found what the budget had in store for seniors on prescription drug costs, I was absolutely against it. I knew that seniors all across my riding—in Toledo, in Lyndhurst, in Maynard, in Oxford Mills, Prescott and Cardinal—would be outraged. I knew it. I knew it because they told me the struggles that they were having, the struggles to make ends meet, to keep up with the rising cost of life under this government. Only a government so out of touch with the day-to-day struggles of Ontarians, stretching their household budgets tighter and tighter, would consider a senior making \$19,300 to be well off—only a government that out of touch. This is such a disconnect that this Premier has, who actually likes to show—she likes to make a lot of pronouncements that she wants to have conversations, but she doesn't actually listen to what the people are saying to her.

When the Premier found out that her own budget hiked the deductible for the Ontario drug benefit by \$70 a year, do you know what she did? She didn't apologize and promise to fix it. No. She promised to consult more to see if she got it right. That's all she did.

First off, given the sham that the budget timeline made of the pre-budget consultation process, I'm not sure too many seniors will be eager to consult with this government. Really, if this Premier is so disconnected from reality that she needs to check with seniors to see if she got it right in raising the low-income threshold to \$19,300, as our leader said, that's absolutely ridiculous.

The issue of drug costs is just one example of something that you see in every section of budget 2016. It's the same theme over and over again: There's something shiny to attract attention in hopes Ontarians won't notice what's really going on. As I stated earlier, they want to distract your attention. They don't want you to take the time to look.

Again, I just want to compliment my caucus for exposing some of these issues this week. They've done a tremendous job.

For seniors, the headline the government wants you to read is "Free Shingles Vaccine." The real story you need to read in the budget is the hike in drug prices and the loss of the Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit.

For students, the government's headline is "Free Tuition." The real story: It's two years away; it only applies to about 30% of students and covers only the average tuition and no other costs; and the government is taking away \$165 million in financial support until it kicks in.

For hospitals, the government proclaims a 1% budget increase. The real story is, it's the first increase, as we all know, that hospitals have had in four years. It doesn't provide any catch-up, and almost one third of that increase—

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: The member can heckle me all he wants, but one third of that increase is offset by clawing back \$107 million in gaming revenue that previously went to hospitals. They don't want to tell you the whole story.

For the north, the headline the government wants you to see is "\$1 Billion for the Ring of Fire." Meanwhile, the real story is that this is the third time they've included this line in the budget without actually spending a dime.

For farmers—well, the finance minister didn't actually offer anything to Ontario's agriculture sector other than a \$28-million cut. I'll get to that problem and the glaring oversight on the agriculture file a little later in my speech.

I'm so proud of our work on this side of the House in the past week to expose, as my leader said earlier, this bait and switch budget.

I want to put some comments on the record for some of my folks in Leeds–Grenville. Prior to the return of the Legislature, I had the opportunity to hear from some of my constituents. I held a series of pre-budget consultations in very small communities in my riding. Over two days, I held meetings in Gananoque, Seeley's Bay, Merrickville and Spencerville. They were excellent discussions. I ended up sending six pages of recommendations to both the finance minister and the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We know those recommendations were ignored by the government. We know this because, as my leader said this morning, the budget was already drafted by the time I sent my letter to the committee—and I sent it before the deadline. It's clear what was being ignored, because the priorities I heard from people in my riding, in particular in rural Ontario, were certainly not reflected in this budget. I don't think anyone would describe this budget as a rural Ontario-friendly budget.

Even if the government ultimately tuned out the recommendations from my constituents, those meetings were really valuable to me. I found real value in having those four meetings and being able to be engaged with my constituents. It gave me the confidence to know that when I'm speaking here today, I'm speaking for the people that I represent when I stand in my place to tell the government that their priorities are wrong.

The budget speaks to infrastructure commitments but does nothing to address the concerns raised by local mayors and local council members at my consultation.

They asked for a review of what they describe as the arbitrary manner in which grant program applications are reviewed for municipalities. It leads to a scenario where one municipality is turned down because they're carrying too much debt while the neighbouring township loses out because they don't have enough debt.

0940

I think it's like the Goldilocks approach to infrastructure: Municipalities are supposed to somehow get it just right for this government before they actually get a dime from them for their infrastructure. Instead of a lottery, these municipal leaders wanted some substantive changes to the process in the budget so they could better plan for their own spending.

Also in the break, I had a chance to have a wonderful speaking opportunity at a breakfast meeting of the Brockville and District Chamber of Commerce. It was a well-attended event. It also gave me a chance to talk about two reports from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, their Emerging Stronger 2016 report and Empowering Ontario, which they released last year.

Now, I'd like to think a government interested in kick-starting our economy and getting Ontario back to work would actually pay attention to some of those reports. Look at the chamber of commerce: They represent 60,000 small and medium-sized businesses. Those, I think, are who we need to engage to get our engine of job creation started again in the province of Ontario.

One of my favourite parts of the Emerging Stronger report is the Ontario Business Confidence Index. It provides some real insight into what these businesses are feeling as we head into the new year. As I told my chamber, the results for 2016 are not encouraging, and they reflect a clear desire by the business community to see our province go in a different direction. Actually, there's quite a disconnect in the confidence index. On one hand, it's encouraging to learn—here's the statistic: 62% of those surveyed expressed confidence in their business's economic outlook. That's slightly up from about 58% last year. It's a positive sign that businesses feel good about what they've done internally to position themselves for growth.

Unfortunately, that's where the good news ends. When it comes to expressing confidence in Ontario's economy, just 30% like what they see going into 2016. It's down from 47% last year. It's actually quite a shocking decrease in just a 12-month period. Frankly, it's a condemnation of this government's performance. And with that lack of confidence, it's no surprise that the survey revealed only 46% of businesses have plans to expand in 2016. That's down from 54% last year: Again, it's headed in the wrong direction.

What should be the take-away for us as legislators on this report? When nearly two thirds of our businesses feel good about the situation but they're hedging their bets on Ontario, that's a message that the government's budget needs to do something different.

The reason businesses lack confidence in our economy is the result of what's happened on this government's

watch over the past 13 years. Sadly, more of the same is found within the pages of the budget we're debating this morning. There's not much here to inspire confidence in Ontario. Heck, the government isn't even inspired; they've reduced their own job creation projections by 16% over last year. Last year, they boasted our economy would create 93,000 jobs in 2016. Now that number is down to 78,000. I always say that well-run businesses want to invest in well-run jurisdictions, and as we know, the words "well run" are two words I don't think you'd ever use to describe Ontario under the Liberal Party.

Our leader outlined in his portion of this morning's leadoff the three asks that our PC caucus wanted to see in the government's budget. I think he did a great job outlining them so I'm not going to go into detail on them again. One of those asks was a credible plan to balance the budget. It goes to the very heart of that reluctance businesses surveyed by the Ontario chamber have when it comes to investing here and creating jobs. They're not going to be fooled by the so-called plan to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18 tabled by the finance minister last week. These businesses wouldn't try to build their own budget by overestimating revenues as this government has done to the tune of \$4 billion. For those watching at home, that's not our caucus saying they've overestimated what they'll take in; that's in the words of the Legislature's Financial Accountability Officer.

Then we have the inevitable \$1.9-billion increase in personal income taxes factored into the government's calculations. The rest of their so-called plan is cobbled together using \$850 million from a provincial contingency fund and, confirming what we've been saying all along, taking revenue from the sell-off of Hydro One. As I told the chamber that morning, any business owner knows you can't fix your bottom line by selling off your business assets. Eventually, you're going to run out of things to sell. That's what's truly amazing here, Speaker.

Interjections.

Mr. Steve Clark: They get mad over there when we expose the truth.

For all the wishful thinking, tax grabbing and asset selling contained in this budget, it still doesn't solve the problem with all that red ink. That's because we now have a structural deficit, one they've managed to paper over with some one-time infusions of cash. As a result, we're still going to watch this year as the province's total debt climbs past the \$300-billion mark for the first time, on its way to a staggering \$308 billion. To put that into perspective, Speaker, that's \$22,103 for every man, every woman and every child in this province. And unfortunately, it's growing. It's shameful.

I can tell you that improving the confidence of our business sector and recruiting new ones to come here doesn't start with being the world's most indebted sub-national. That means, even if the deficit is eliminated, interest payments on our debt remain the third-largest spending item in this budget. As I told the president of St. Lawrence College, Glenn Vollebregt, when he was at my speech at the Brockville chamber, how do you build a

workforce for tomorrow when the budget for training, colleges and universities is \$3.6 billion less than interest on the debt?

You don't inspire confidence by refusing to get serious about the soaring cost of electricity in this province. I mentioned earlier the Ontario chamber's Empowering Ontario report. I know the Minister of Energy likes to debunk any criticisms and concerns we raise about how the cost of electricity is driving businesses and industry out of the province and people from their homes. I want people to understand we're not responding to information. The opposition is not just simply making this up, Speaker. Our questions and concerns about Hydro One and the cost of electricity are based on reports from the Auditor General, the Financial Accountability Officer and the Ombudsman. Those are all independent, non-partisan officers of this Legislature, and they've exposed mismanagement of the energy sector and have let Ontarians know that rates are going to rise, as we've said many times in this House, 42% between 2013 and 2018. Remember, that's on top of the already highest rates in North America.

It's those increases, Speaker, that the Ontario chamber's study found will lead to the following—here's a quote from their report: "One in 20 businesses in the province expect to close their doors in the next five years due to rising electricity prices. In addition, 38% will see their bottom line shrink, with the cost of electricity delaying or cancelling investment in the years to come."

Again, you'd think that an independent report like the one from the chamber would lead the government to provide cost relief in the electricity sector, and it should be in this budget. Instead, homeowners got nothing other than, basically—we've said it in the House—a \$2-a-month reduction. It pales in comparison to the \$100 increase that they're facing because of rates. In terms of small business and industry, they don't even get that. This budget offers no relief; it just offers more of the same. The take-away is that the government is happy to watch those businesses surveyed by the chamber close their doors and throw more people out of work.

I just want to take a moment to speak to something that really shocked me in regard to this report. It was the Minister of Energy's response to the chamber of commerce Empowering Ontario report. The executive director of the chamber in Brockville, Pam Robertson, wrote to me for feedback on the report. She included a letter that the minister gave the chamber as part of this correspondence. Here's how he opened his response to the Ontario chamber on their survey and recommendations: "Many of the key aspects of electricity planning and system management were not captured in your report." That sounds to me a lot like his response to the Auditor General. He patted the chamber on the head and said, "This is too complicated for you people to understand." I wrote back to my chamber, "I'd suggest the Ontario chamber and the 60,000 businesses it represents do understand the issue well—because their members are footing an increasingly larger bill for the decisions this

government is making.” It was unbelievable to see that that was Bob Chiarelli’s response.

I want to now turn to something about the budget that is of great concern to the folks back home in Leeds–Grenville. That, of course, is that the budget absolutely ignores the rural communities and the province’s agricultural sector. Actually, I should correct my record. We would be better off if they ignored ag instead of cutting the budget by \$28 million.

0950

That cut to OMAFRA’s budget is from the same government, remember, whose Premier in 2013 challenged Ontario’s agri-food sector to create 120,000 new jobs by 2020—the same Premier who, a year after issuing that challenge, stood by as the University of Guelph closed the agricultural colleges in Kemptville and Alfred two years ago this month. They’ve since put no real money on the table to ensure the continued delivery of the agriculture degree and diploma programs at those colleges.

Look, I respect and applaud the work of the municipality of North Grenville and what they’re trying to do to revitalize the Kemptville campus. But I maintain today, as I have since March 12, 2014, when the closure of Kemptville College was announced, that those degree and diploma programs must be brought back. That’s the only way to do it. It’s not just to ensure that the campus has a future—but a guarantee that we’re producing the educated graduates in agri-food in Ontario that we need, to compete in that global economy. But there’s nothing in the budget for those programs, which are so vital to helping the agri-food sector meet the Premier’s 120,000-job challenge.

On the electricity front, rural Ontarians are hit the hardest by the soaring costs of hydro, because they pay higher delivery charges. But again, the OFA’s request for a farm industrial rate was ignored in the budget. I guess that 120,000-job challenge from the Premier was just another one of her stretch goals.

As for our agriculture critic, the member for Haldimand–Norfolk, he noted in a question this week to the minister that there’s just one reference to agriculture in the budget. It’s on page 346, the very last page of the document—almost an afterthought, I might suggest to the House today. But I was quite intrigued by the reference, because it concerns value-added farm activities and the property taxes that penalize farmers for investing in them. When a farmer, for instance, wants to create a product from what’s produced on the farm, the portion of their property used for that activity is taxed at the industrial rate. Talk about a disincentive for the farmer.

I raised this issue in question period and a late show in November 2013, in relation to a pair of farm operations in Leeds–Grenville: Bushgarden Farmstead Cheese in Rideau Lakes, and Edgewood Farms in Elizabethtown–Kitley. I told the story then, Speaker, of Nigel Smith, the artisan cheese maker, and what he went through to finally get his operation off the ground so he could start making world-class cheeses. It’s an incredible story of perseverance. Nigel spent three and a half years fighting this

government’s red tape to make it happen. When the big day finally came and he did put out that “open for business” sign, the first person down the laneway wasn’t a customer. It was MPAC, with news that his artisan operation was being classified as industrial and he’d be paying an additional \$1,200 in property taxes.

Over at Edgewood Farms, Terry and Dave McGurrin were forced to close their pancake house due to harassment by MPAC. They demanded they pay year-round commercial taxes for a six-week operation. And if that wasn’t enough, MPAC showed up after the pancake house was shut down, to grill Terry about why she still owned a cash register.

This disgusting treatment of value-added farm activities by MPAC is something I’ve been sounding off on for about two years.

But even after all that time, budget 2016 is a disappointment because it doesn’t outline how the problem is actually going to get fixed. No, all the agri-food sector gets is a promise—another promise—to try to work out the solution.

I’d like to pick up the phone and make a phone call to both Nigel Smith and the McGurrins. I’m hopeful a solution is coming, but I know this government all too well, Speaker. Frankly, even if I did make the call, I don’t think they’d believe me, with this government.

On this file, I challenge the government: Follow through on your word. Don’t just put empty rhetoric in the budget. Actually move forward in the agri-food sector and recognize these on-farm-premise operations.

Speaker, the lead this morning by my leader talked about this government’s waste, their mismanagement and their scandal on a scale that I think is just unprecedented in our province’s history. Billions are wasted on gas plants, eHealth, Ornge, SAMS and, up next, a carbon tax scheme that promises to be this government’s latest debacle.

As I said in the media after the budget was tabled last week, what worries me is that this government has no idea how their plan will reduce carbon emissions. They can’t tell us anything about it. But what they’ve got all revved up, Speaker, are the details that they’re going to add 4.3 cents a litre to the cost of gasoline, which is so typical of this government—to figure out how to separate people from their money first and then worry about everything else after.

I heard the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change mention this week how he hopes that the increased cost of gas will lead more people to ride their bicycles to work. I’ll be sure, this weekend, to share his advice with the folks in my riding who commute from Brockville to Ottawa or to Kingston to work. That’s the kind of advice you get from a government that tables a budget that continues to grow the a debt that has increased by 91% in a decade.

Think about it for a moment, about having someone try to commute in a rural riding where there’s no infrastructure there to be able to support that. Think about the mismanagement of this government—so reckless that a

\$139-billion debt when they took over in 2003 has ballooned to \$308 billion. Even a moderate level of incompetence over that time would leave more of that \$11.7 billion in interest payments to go towards front-line services.

We hear government members always heckling us in opposition that we want it both ways. They say we want to balance the books while asking for improved hospital and home care services, more affordable electricity and investments in our rural communities. But it's not an either/or proposition. We can do both, but only if we have a government that understands how to manage this province in the best interests of Ontarians—not the kind of government Ontario has today. They don't make life easier for Ontarians, particularly for those of us who live with a rural postal code.

This budget offers more proof that life is harder under the Liberals. But there is some good news: People are getting wise to this government, and increasingly we're hearing from every corner of the province that Ontarians won't be fooled again.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? Further debate? The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Just by tradition, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins–James Bay has moved adjournment of the debate. Shall the motion carry? Carried.

Debate adjourned.

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

Hon. Ted McMeekin: No further business, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing as there's no further business, this House stands recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 0957 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to welcome the parents of page Richard Fan. His mother, Cherry Liu, and father, Jeffrey Fan, are here this morning and I'm looking forward to our lunch together.

Aussi, je veux prendre ce temps pour accueillir tous les élèves francophones de la 11^e et 12^e année qui sont avec nous aujourd'hui. Ces élèves, de partout en Ontario, sont à Queen's Park pour le Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario. Bienvenue, chers étudiants et étudiantes, à Queen's Park. Je veux dire un petit « shout-out » à Geneviève et Sylvain de la FESFO. Merci d'être venus.

M. Gilles Bisson: De la part du caucus NPD et de notre chef, M^{me} Horwath, on aimerait, de la part de toute l'Assemblée, féliciter les jeunes qui ont été capables de venir travailler dans notre Parlement aujourd'hui. On leur souhaite une très belle session qu'ils vont avoir débutant ce soir.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Mr. Speaker, please help me welcome the grade 10 students from St. Augustine Catholic High School in the great riding of Oak Ridges–Markham.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I would like to welcome all the dietitians who are here today. In particular, Leslie Whittington-Carter is from my riding, and my niece Anne Fougere is down from my riding and is also a dietitian. Welcome.

Mr. Han Dong: I would like to welcome the family of today's page captain Xavier Hollott-Lo: Ms. Chloe Hollott-Lo and Mr. Maxx Hollott. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I would like to welcome today, here with the francophone youth Parliament, a constituent of mine: Julien Leclerc from Jeanne-Lajoie school in Pembroke.

M. Michael Mantha : C'est avec grand plaisir que j'introduis un gentilhomme du Nord, défenseur de l'éducation, M. Larry French.

M. Grant Crack: C'est un grand plaisir pour moi de souhaiter la bienvenue à tous les étudiants qui sont ici aujourd'hui pour participer au Parlement jeunesse, et aussi à Jean-Sébastien Boyer, Jérémie Racine, Véronique Bureau Mortimer, Loïc-Arnaud Plouffe et Nataniel Quenneville, de Casselman et Hawkesbury.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Along with the other fellow dietitians that we've welcomed, I want to especially welcome Atheana Brown, from the City of Kawartha Lakes Family Health Team to Queen's Park. Welcome, Atheana.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I would like to welcome a number of dietitians from my riding of Perth–Wellington to Queen's Park today: Paula Seifried and Jenny Harrison from the Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team; Anna Maria Fruscione from the Star Family Health Team; Teresa Fowler from the Happy Valley Family Health Team; and Jessica Janssens from the Stratford Family Health Team.

M. Michael Mantha: Encore une fois, c'est avec grand plaisir que je veux introduire un bon jeune homme de Dubreuilville, M. Dany Raymond.

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: C'est tout un honneur, au nom de la section de l'Ontario de l'Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie, de saluer les 85 élèves qui sont ici avec nous pour représenter les futurs politiciens du Parlement jeunesse de la francophonie.

J'aimerais aussi saluer tout spécialement ceux d'Ottawa qui sont avec nous et que j'ai eu le grand plaisir de rencontrer.

Et, monsieur le Président, je suis désolée, mais je vais le faire : un ancien membre est ici présent dans la Chambre, M. Gilles Morin, le député d'Ottawa–Orléans.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to introduce, in the west members' gallery, Mr. Lorne Given from the riding of Sarnia–Lambton, a guest of mine here at Queen's Park.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Bienvenue à tous les étudiants du Parlement jeunesse francophone.

I also want to introduce Mrs. Hurley, a dietitian from my riding. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd also like to introduce and welcome to Queen's Park the Dietitians of Canada, who are here with us in the public gallery. Many of them are primary care providers, and we're just so pleased to have them here with us today.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have an introduction, on behalf of the member from Niagara West—Glanbrook, for page captain Charlotte Fritz, who's here with her mother, Wendy Ward. Welcome to Queen's Park today.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I am delighted to welcome to the Legislature dietitian Marg Alfieri, who is visiting from Kitchener Centre.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Angela and Heather Massel, from my riding of Kitchener—Conestoga, as well as David and Alicia, as well as the others, for our rare-disease select committee debate today. Thank you for coming.

M^{me} Sophie Kiwala: Je veux souhaiter la grande bienvenue aux étudiants qui viennent de Kingston et les Îles. Je crois que Nathan est là—bienvenue.

M. Lorne Coe: Je veux présenter une étudiante francophone de ma circonscription de Whitby—Oshawa. Son nom est Mélodie Ouellette, et elle est étudiante à l'École secondaire catholique Saint-Charles-Garnier. Elle est ici aujourd'hui avec la délégation du Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I am pleased to be able to welcome Deborah Burton, Gidget Herbet and Janice Muccio, all from York—Simcoe and surrounding areas, for the debate on rare diseases.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I am pleased to welcome grade 10 student Amira Gamute from École secondaire Gaétan-Gervais, who is here with the Parlement jeunesse.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to welcome Maya Chadha, a grade 10 student from London West, who is here for the Parlement jeunesse francophone de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As is the custom of this Speaker, I would like to introduce, in the Speaker's gallery, the member from Carleton East in the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th Parliaments, Monsieur Gilles Morin.

Interjection.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci beaucoup, monsieur le Président.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Acting Premier. This government has no credibility. They claim that they listened, but it is clear they did not. No senior in the province of Ontario asked for their drug benefit deductible to be nearly doubled. No parent asked for their child activity tax credit to be cut. No one thought that a toonie would help seniors struggling to pay their \$800 hydro bill.

Why does the middle class have to pay for this government's smoke-and-mirrors budget?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We're very proud of the budget that the Minister of Finance presented last week. Clearly, there are several initiatives in that budget that help Ontarians, not least of which is free tuition for low-income families and more affordable tuition for middle-income families. That one initiative alone takes a tremendous burden off middle-income families.

1040

We're also creating 110,000 jobs through our \$160-billion infrastructure plan; 110,000 jobs a year are being created because of our investments. I think that helps the middle class.

We're increasing health care funding by \$1 billion—\$1 billion in one year. That's the increase. That's going to help every one of us who accesses our health care system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Acting Premier: The government only tells part of the story. It's important to tell the whole story and actually read the fine print.

In the next two years, this government will take a quarter of a billion dollars from Ontario families by taking away their tax credits. The Healthy Homes Renovation Tax Credit—gone. That means Ontario seniors will now have to pay \$19 million more to make their homes accessible. Families who have children in sports and arts programs will have to pay another \$65 million. Going to university or college over the next two years—don't be fooled—combined, those students will pay another \$165 million because you're killing the education tax credit.

Robin Hood didn't steal from the hard-working middle class. Why is this government?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, I'm pleased that the Leader of the Opposition has raised this issue, because we're acting on a recommendation from Don Drummond's commission on the reform of the public sector. One of the things that Don Drummond urged us to do was look at the tax credits that actually cost us a significant amount of money and ask ourselves: Are we achieving the outcomes we had hoped would be achieved with that tax credit?

When it comes to the home renovation tax credit, it actually turns out that not too many people were taking advantage of it, and those who were were people with significant means, and there's a federal tax credit that does the same thing. So, yes, we eliminated that tax credit because it wasn't having the outcome it was intended to have.

Interjections.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Similarly with the Children's Activity Tax Credit, it wasn't having the uptake. It wasn't actually getting kids into sports. It wasn't getting them into recreation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock, please. Before I move to final supplementary, two things: Interjections are starting to rise; I'm going to

bring them down. Number two, I would caution the member on things you cannot say indirectly that you can't say directly. I just caution among the last phrase that he used. So avoid that, please.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Acting Premier: I appreciate the government's spin, but beyond the smoke and mirrors, the reality is, the middle class is paying more. For every bill and fee they're seeing with this government, it's all going up. That's the reality of this budget. There doesn't seem to be a fee that isn't increasing. Camping, fishing, hunting, court applications, liquor licences, event permits, even for charity—it's all going up. Heating your home and the cost of gas—going up. Everything is going up with this budget.

When will this government realize that they are breaking the backs of Ontario's families? When will you stop this attack on Ontario's middle class?

Interjections.

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

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I guess, Speaker, the new PC Party is against helping those who are facing the greatest challenges. That's, I think, unfortunate. But let's talk about what we are doing to help the middle class.

We're lowering hospital parking fees: 900,000 patients and visitors every year will benefit from lower hospital parking fees. The shingles vaccine—people have been asking us to fund the shingles vaccine and we are moving forward with that in this budget. We're spending \$100 million to help people lower their home energy consumption—\$100 million. I think that's helping the middle class. We're eliminating the \$30 Drive Clean fee. We're continuing to lower auto insurance—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, and what about people on propane?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll start. Member from Renfrew, come to order.

Answer?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —not to mention the 260,000 kids who are taking advantage of full-day kindergarten in Ontario.

RARE DISEASES

Mr. Patrick Brown: To the Acting Premier: I'm going to ask for her sincere consideration. I've been clear that the PC caucus will support a good idea no matter where its origin is, no matter where and from what side of the Legislature it comes from. Today, the Liberals have a chance to do the same.

We've been joined by patients and their families struggling with rare disorders. They have travelled here today to show their support for the member from Kitchener-Conestoga and his motion to create a select committee to examine the enormous challenges facing the rare disease community. Will the government put their partisanship aside, recognizing that this will help these families and

help these patients? Will the government support the member from Kitchener-Conestoga in this important motion?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to commend the member from Kitchener-Conestoga. He has been a tireless advocate on behalf of individuals in this province who do have rare diseases—and their families and their communities. He has done important work.

I was proud, earlier this week, to meet with many individuals from across the province that do have a rare disease or are advocates or family members of people with rare diseases. It's clear that we need to continue to do more. I announced funding at University Health Network for a particular rare disease, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, and funding for a centre of excellence at University Health Network and, quite frankly, a template that can be used—because it was evolved through an expert panel that we created of clinical experts; patients were part of that process as well. We created a template that I think will be beneficial for other rare diseases as well. I'll be happy to speak more in the supplementals.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplemental: the member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the minister: Minister, we've had people from across the province travel here today to mark their support for a united and transparent effort that will finally address rare disease suffering. Year after year, they've watched as the government has turned its back on their pleas for help. They have watched as this government acknowledges their challenges with stopgap measures and one-off announcements that have only prolonged the suffering.

Today I am proposing an all-party select committee process which every one of these people, and the hundreds of thousands they represent, are prepared to stand by. Minister, will you stand with them?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: One of the other aspects of the announcement on Monday—and I have to commend, among others, the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, that convened on Monday when many individuals, family members and advocates on behalf of individuals with rare diseases came to Queen's Park. I met with them and talked with them about another important initiative that this government has taken. Building on the work that we've done through the expert panel on Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, we are creating a working group that will be focused solely on provincial efforts for rare diseases. It will be comprised of clinical experts—experts in the field. It will be comprised of patients and patient advocates so that we can work on those fundamental issues of prevention, detection, providing the appropriate supports, and access to drugs as well—all of the elements that are important, as a government that we should be providing for these individuals. I am happy to speak once again in the supplemental that I know is coming.

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

Mr. Michael Harris: Minister, your working group announcement earlier this week was an acknowledgement of the need for a government response to the heart-wrenching struggles that inaction has allowed to fester for too many years. Later today, you will have the opportunity to build on that acknowledgement by supporting the open, all-party select committee process that has proven successful in leading to informed recommendations that demand government's response.

Minister, don't turn your back on rare disease sufferers. Will you support my motion today, yes or no?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I think that those that have rare diseases and disorders would agree that it's important to have a working group to begin action now, to bring together clinical experts, to bring together patients and patient advocates, to begin to take concrete steps like we did earlier this week in announcing the centre of excellence for a rare disease, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. Quoting the Canadian—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Merci.

1050

Hon. Eric Hoskins: After the government's announcement, COD, the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, said, "Today, on International Rare Disease Day, the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders (COD) welcomes the announcement made by Ontario Health Minister Eric Hoskins to open a new clinic ... which could be expanded to other rare disorders, as well as his commitment to strike a working group to develop an Ontario approach to a coordinated provincial health care system for patients with rare disorders."

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Acting Premier. Yesterday I was in London talking to nurses about health care. Nurse Rebecca Smith told me that her shift at London Health Sciences Centre on Tuesday night was the worst shift she has ever worked in 16 years. There were 21 patients with psychiatric emergencies. Because of Liberal cuts, a hospital boardroom was turned into an overflow room. A hospital boardroom became a room for patients. Other patients were waiting over eight hours to be seen in emergency.

When someone is facing a psychiatric crisis, they deserve care, not an eight-hour wait in a makeshift, converted boardroom, followed by seven days stuck in the ER because there aren't any beds.

When Rebecca left her shift the next morning, there were still 100 people waiting in the ER.

Will the Acting Premier acknowledge that Liberal health care cuts are hurting Ontario's patients?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question.

It wasn't that long ago—a couple of months ago, I think—that I had the privilege and the honour, with the President of the Treasury Board, the MPP for London North Centre, to be in London to announce the commitment by the government of \$1.2 million toward the opening of a new mental health and addictions crisis centre in London that is going to do precisely the important work that the leader of the third party is referring to: providing crisis intervention for adults aged 16 and up living in London and Middlesex county; individuals who are experiencing a mental health or addiction crisis, who require that immediate response or support. They can provide that in the community. It will be run by the Canadian Mental Health Association. It was a great announcement and an important investment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Regardless of how privileged this health minister is, the psychiatric patients in London are still falling through the cracks.

Those are not the only health cuts that are hurting patients and hurting Ontarians. Last week, without any warning or consultation, struggling seniors across Ontario learned that the Liberals would be nearly doubling their drug costs.

Earlier this week, the Premier of this province had a eureka moment and suddenly decided that she would hold consultations and actually talk to people about her plan to make seniors pay more for prescription drugs. But so far, this Premier and this Liberal government have not promised the seniors of Ontario that anything will actually change.

Will this Liberal government make a clear commitment to seniors that they won't be paying more for their prescription drugs?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, per the question yesterday, I'm still confused as to whether the leader of the third party is asking for more consultation or less consultation. I would hope she would agree, now that we've actually posted the regulation, that it would be the appropriate thing for us to have discussions with seniors and seniors' groups, their advocates and others across the health care spectrum to look at ways that we can make sure we get this right for all seniors.

Of course, our focus in the budget, as the Premier has said, is to bring 170,000 more low-income—the lowest income—seniors into a bracket where they pay no annual deductible.

I plead to the leader of the third party that she just simply reference those 170,000 more seniors who will benefit once. It's an important acknowledgement that they actually care that we're helping those who are most vulnerable to go into that bracket.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We know how confused this minister is, and it's just too bad that it's the patients of Ontario who are paying the price for his confusion.

Liberal health cuts are not just affecting prescription drug costs for seniors and care for psychiatric emergency

patients. On Tuesday, I was at a rally with hundreds of Hamilton nurses sounding the alarm bells about further positions being cut at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton. The meagre funding gestures in the budget were little more than tokens.

Will this government admit to Ontarians that they will continue to see an erosion of their health care system, including more firing of nurses and longer wait times for patients?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We are investing a new \$1 billion into the health care system this year, and we're increasing our hospital funding by more than \$345 million, which represents an over 2% increase to the hospital line in the budget. We're adding new dollars into home and community care: \$250 million. We're adding \$75 million more into hospice and end-of-life and palliative care. We're adding money into mental health supports across this province. We're adding money into a new shingles vaccine that we'll make available free of charge to seniors between the ages of 65 and 70.

There are many, many new investments that add up to \$1 billion more—nearly \$52 billion this year spent on health care. I'm proud of the investments that we're making. They're making a real difference.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Acting Premier. It has taken less than a week for the Premier of this province to acknowledge and admit that her budget has serious flaws. Hospital funding is not keeping up with inflation. It is not keeping up with population growth. It is not keeping up with the pressures and demands of an aging population. This is another serious flaw in their budget that they introduced last week.

Will this Acting Premier admit that what this means to Ontarians is even less health care for them when they need it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, her numbers just don't add up, Mr. Speaker: \$345 million in new funding to our hospitals is a more than 2% increase in the funding that goes to the hospitals. It's more than the rate of inflation. It's more than the consumer price index. It's an important investment.

That's quite separate from the \$12 billion over the next decade that we're investing in new hospitals and improved hospitals, which doesn't even include recently built, announced and opened hospitals like the Humber River Hospital or the new Oakville hospital; the funding that we're providing to hospitals all over the province: Providence Care in Kingston, the Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital for York region, and renovations to acute-care and long-term-care beds at Atikokan General Hospital.

We're also adding to the fund that we have for maintenance and renovation—

Mr. Paul Miller: You're closing mental health care at St. Joe's.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, second time.

Hon. Eric Hoskins:—an additional \$50 million in that funding for renovation and maintenance in hospitals.

So our hospitals are growing. Their operating budgets are increasing. We're adding to the capital investments that we're making in our hospitals, and we're seeing the improvements in outcomes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Minister of Health should darn well know what the inflationary pressures are on a hospital, including population growth and an aging demographic. He's not telling the whole facts around what's happening to the pressure in hospitals. Whether it's 1% or 2%, he's splitting hairs on the fact that hospitals are feeling the crunch and they are closing beds. They are firing nurses. They are postponing and cancelling operations and procedures.

Health care is supposed to be about people. That's what health care is supposed to be about. Struggling seniors are being told that they're going to see their medication costs nearly double.

Why is this government attempting to balance the budget on the backs of seniors and patients in Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: A \$1-billion new investment in health care—I know the leader of the third party might believe that our hospitals are the centre of the health care universe. They're an important foundation of our health care system. Perhaps she doesn't want to reform and transform our health care system so it truly is patient-centred, so that it truly does focus on outcomes.

The investments in the transformations that we're making involve our hospitals, and we've reflected that in an additional \$345 million, but we're also moving patients and procedures and opportunities in care and support outside of our hospital environment.

To home and community care: an additional \$250 million in the coming year, which was the new investment that we made this year, as well, in home and community care, as we continue to take advantage of the reality that we can provide support and services.

We're making, and we announced in this year's budget as well, further investments in long-term care.

We're making investments in mental health services—where the evidence shows that the outcomes are better when we actually care for those individuals outside of the hospital environment when we can.

I would hope that the leader of the third—

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

Final supplementary.

1100

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday, I heard stories of community care nurses who were finding IV needles still in the arms of patients who were discharged with those needles in their arms. That's the kind of community care that is being provided because the hospitals are overloaded and can't do the kind of job that they want to do.

People expect their health care system—

Interjection.

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

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, they also told me of patients who are revolving back into emergency because they're leaving hospitals too sick and they are not getting the kind of community care that they need and they deserve. That is not the kind of transformation that takes care of patients the way that they should be taken care of.

People expect the health care system to be there for them where they need it and when they need it. It is one of the basics that people expect their government to get right. Instead of getting it right, people see fewer nurses, closed hospital beds, cancelled surgeries, overflowing ERs, and more expensive medications for seniors. How has this government lost sight of the fact that health care is supposed to be about people?

Interjections.

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

Interjection.

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

Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, just because she says it doesn't mean it's true.

I think it's important that we look at the facts—the fact that we have some of the best—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Finish, please.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The facts include that we have the shortest wait times in all of Canada; we have among the best cancer care in the entire world; we have the best outcomes, and outcomes that are improving. An independent study by the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences has shown that we are getting, as a result of our changes—

Mr. Paul Miller: Put some mustard on that baloney.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not going to accept that. The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek is warned.

You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: With our changes to health care, with our funding reform, an increased number of patients are being treated, a minimal impact on readmission rates and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. That's 10 seconds.

New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Minister of Finance. Today, the Financial Accountability Officer referred to the budget as “vague” and “uncertain.” That's because last week's budget confirmed that the government is using one-time revenues and contingency funds to make the deficit appear smaller.

One example is using one-time money from the brisk housing market: \$500 million in extra sales tax revenue and \$300 million more in land transfer taxes were booked as operating revenue. BMO Capital Markets wrote, “Asset sales of \$5.7 billion ... are one-time in nature, and don't address any underlying structural deficit.”

Speaker, I ask the minister: Why do you continue to use one-time money to artificially lower your deficit?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd like to begin by thanking the Financial Accountability Officer for his report. The FAO has an important mandate to provide forward-looking commentary. On page 1 of his report, the FAO confirms that we are on target and on schedule to balance the budget by 2017-18: “Ontario's 2016 budget reaffirmed the government's commitment to eliminate the budget deficit by 2017-18, and to maintain a balanced budget going forward.” It's also important to note that the FAO affirms key aspects of our plan. He specifically highlights the fact that our assumptions for new federal funding are prudent.

In our budget preparation process each year, we ask private sector economists to review our assumptions in order to ensure that they're valid. In 2016, it was no different. Three economic experts reviewed our economic forecasts and affirmed that they are reasonable. That's on page 245 of the budget, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the minister: What we didn't hear was that because of using one-time funding, the Financial Accountability Officer also said, “Maintaining balanced budgets beyond 2017 will likely prove challenging.”

This government is so desperate for cash they are threatening to go back as far as 1989 to target commercial entities for land transfer taxes. This is frightening the markets—they see through the desperation—and making Ontario less desirable for investment.

Bryne Purchase, Ontario's former chief economist and deputy at many ministries stated, “The added revenue from cap and trade and the Hydro One sale helped to make the provincial numbers look better.”

Every expert sees through what this government is doing, Speaker.

I ask the minister: Just who do you think you're fooling with this pre-election number fudging?

Interjections.

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

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Guard your language in terms of what you're supposed to say in here, please.

Minister.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In preparation of the document and in preparation of the budget, you take forecasts. We have leading economic forecasters from across the country, over 15 of them, provide their projections. We then take them, average them,

and taper them down. Furthermore, we look at experts and they review them.

Looking at the full outlook period for the 2016 budget, which covers chapters 16 to 19, our government's average nominal GDP forecast is in line with those private sector forecasts. New economic data since the release of our budget confirms the economy is on track and advancing at a relatively robust pace.

Independent advice is important to the government and that is why we indeed value the Financial Accountability Officer's input.

It's important to note the budget assessments by two credit rating agencies, which the member opposite often refers to, and here's what they say—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. We're not going to hear that.

New question.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the minister for seniors affairs. All of us in this House have a duty to stand up for seniors in our ridings, but it's the minister's job to speak up at the cabinet table and ensure all seniors are protected. Speaker, this budget shows that the minister didn't do his job and the Premier didn't listen to the people of Ontario. Instead of helping people, the Liberals have chosen to force most seniors to pay 70% more for their prescription drugs, starting as early as this summer. Every member in this House should know that that's wrong, and this minister should know better than anyone.

People deserve to know: Will the minister for seniors toe the Liberal line or will he do his job and stand up for seniors by telling this Premier she's out of touch with the people of Ontario?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Speaker, I want to thank the member for the question. Let me deviate for a second before I answer the question: Tomorrow is the deadline for all the seniors' community groups for submitting the seniors community application grant. I would take the opportunity to advise every member of the House, since we only have another day, to get on with their communities' seniors' groups, because this particular program is huge; 104 ridings out of 107 ridings are benefiting from this program.

I would hope that the members get busy and contact the seniors who we are helping, and I hope that they put in some applications for the benefit of our seniors in every riding of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, again to the minister: I am busy. I am busy worrying about what this Liberal government is doing to seniors' health care.

Here's what the Liberal plan to hike drug costs really means to seniors: It means more worry for seniors on fixed incomes. It means tighter household budgets and less retirement security. It undermines the principle of

universal access to health care, which should include prescription drugs.

Worst of all, it means seniors can't trust the Premier to listen and put their priorities first. Seniors deserve a minister who will speak up for them and say no to the Premier's plan to hike the price on drugs for seniors.

Will the minister commit to seniors today by voting against the Liberal budget that increases costs for Ontario seniors? Do the right thing: Stop the increase in price to seniors' prescriptions today.

1110

Hon. Mario Sergio: Speaker, as I travel throughout Ontario, seniors' groups are very delighted with what we are giving them to support them, to keep them active and engaged. The budget reflects and builds on what we have been providing for our seniors: \$250 million, as the Minister of Health has mentioned, for health care and community care; \$170 million for seniors between 65 and 70, for the shingles vaccine; an additional \$75 million for three years, for community-based residential hospice and palliative care. The people in palliative and hospice are seniors as well. We are looking after those people there.

A 50% reduction in hospital parking prices—130,000 seniors are benefiting from that. And what do I have to say—173,000 seniors are saving \$100 on their—

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

New question.

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, we know that investment in infrastructure across our province is key to economic growth. Besides playing a big part in our quality of life, investing in infrastructure is one of the most important things that we can do to stimulate the economy in the short term and improve our productivity and competitiveness in the long term. Whether it's the expansion of a regional road or waste water systems running under our streets, we all depend on high-quality infrastructure to keep our communities functioning.

Despite their smaller populations, rural municipalities continue to have big infrastructure demands. People need their roads widened and their bridges secured. Rural and small-town Ontario cannot be left behind by investments in our big cities.

Minister, could you please inform the House on what this government is doing to improve rural infrastructure?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Northumberland–Quinte West for his question this morning. As many in this House would know, prior to coming here in 2003, the member for Northumberland–Quinte West was probably one of the most popular mayors ever in the history of Brighton, Ontario.

He knows full well that that's why, as part of our largest investment in infrastructure in Ontario's history, rural municipalities continue to access funding under the

Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund. OCIF helps small, rural and northern communities build and repair roads, bridges, water, and waste water treatment systems—projects that deliver on local community needs across the province.

I want to remind everybody in this House: In the late 1990s, we had the Who Does What committee. It was the “who got done in” committee. That was municipalities in eastern Ontario, where 43% of all the roads and bridges were downloaded.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Minister. I’m glad to hear—and I know my constituents in the riding of Northumberland–Quinte West, along with Cobourg mayor Brocanier, Mayor Walas from Brighton and Mayor Harrison from Quinte West, spoke very highly about this infrastructure funding, Minister.

You have made it clear that our government believes in working collaboratively with all levels of government to ensure we do what’s best for the province and its people. Rural communities have competing interests when it comes to deciding what local infrastructure projects to fund. They have a diverse range of needs, including roads, bridges and water supply networks. This funding will deliver on some long-standing municipal needs.

But, Mr. Speaker, municipalities need permanent, predictable formula allocations to help local governments plan accordingly. In order to protect their quality of life and foster new economic development, could the minister—

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

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member for Northumberland–Quinte West for his supplementary.

On the Monday of the ROMA/OGRA conference, Premier Wynne delivered exceptionally good news to rural municipalities. We announced that OCIF will triple from \$100 million to \$300 million per year for 2018-19, with \$200 million in predictable, formula-based funding to meet asset management plans for those municipalities; and \$100 million available in application-based funding, allowing smaller municipalities to apply to invest in critical infrastructure needs.

Mr. Speaker, don’t take my word on how good this program is. I want to quote the mayor from Smiths Falls, Ontario, Shawn Pankow, who claimed: “For the first time that I’ve been to OGRA it was encouraging to come back with some positive news.”

ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

In June 2015, you cut \$20 million from the Assistive Devices Program. We warned you then that this cut would result in long waits for service and damaging results for more than 300,000 Ontarians who depend on it. But, Minister, you disagreed and dismissed our con-

cerns over the cuts as “providing them in a more efficient way.”

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: I want to know, what are the wait times for Assistive Devices after the government-imposed cuts from 10 months ago?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I’m very proud of our ADP, our Assistive Devices Program. It assists many, many Ontarians. In fact, there are 8,000 different supports and devices that are included in our ADP. Last year, we actually helped 350,000 Ontarians with support to obtain those devices and often to maintain them as well. In fact, that’s increased dramatically. It’s pretty well doubled since we came into office in 2003. In fact we’ve more than doubled our funding since we came into office and formed government in 2003. It includes a whole variety of items, from home oxygen to insulin pumps and ostomy supplies.

It is a program which is challenging because the need is great, Mr. Speaker, and we try to make sure that we provide the level of support that each individual requires.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: Jeff Preston suffers from muscular dystrophy and has spent his whole life in a wheelchair. Jeff is one of those 300,000 Ontarians whose life depends on timely access to adaptive equipment through Assistive Devices. He has been waiting to be assessed for a suitable wheelchair for almost a year, wondering each day—and these are his words, Minister—“if this will be the day of his worst nightmare where he is made a prisoner in his own home.”

There are too many vulnerable Ontarians like Jeff Preston facing an intolerably long wait and left suffering. My question is, what action is the minister going to take today to remedy this inexcusable backlog so that Jeff and all other Ontarians needing repairs for their assistive devices, wheelchairs and prosthetics can live with dignity and independence?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to commend Dr. Preston as well—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Mr. Preston. Jeff Preston.

Hon. Eric Hoskins:—sorry, Mr. Preston—

Hon. Eric Hoskins: My colleagues have just re-emphasized that he’s a tremendous advocate for individuals who do require—and in fact my ministry has reached out to Mr.—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Dr. Preston.

Hon. Eric Hoskins:—to Dr. Preston. We have reached out to him, and we are listening to his advice and he’s providing a lot of very good advice. I’m not sure what more the member opposite would like me to do. We are working with him. He is providing good advice. He is a great advocate for this, and it works within the context of a program that is providing more than 8,000—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, you asked a question—listen.

Hon. Eric Hoskins:—devices and supports to more than 350,000 Ontarians. It’s an important program.

We're proud of the fact that we have doubled the number of people who benefit and we've more than doubled the funding for the program.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Education. The minister claims that the potential closure of schools offering specialized supports has nothing to do with money. She even went so far as to say that it's "for the sake of the children."

Speaker, why don't we let the children have a say in what's best for them? A student at Trillium school said, "Please don't let the Liberals close my school. The school gives people like myself hope, hope that we can get a job, hope that we can get an education so we could live a happy life."

The closure of Robarts School for the Deaf or Amethyst school, both in London, would leave students in southwestern Ontario with nowhere else to turn.

Will the Minister of Education listen to parents, education workers and, most of all, students, and commit to keeping all specialized provincial and demonstration schools open?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I do want to reinforce that we are in fact committed to the success of all our students. That includes those who are deaf and hard-of-hearing and those who have severe learning disabilities. We are reviewing the programs for those students. Part of that is that we are going around and we actually are speaking with parents and students, because we do want their input.

1120

It's also true that we updated the definition of learning disabilities a few years ago. We've updated the provincial policy program memorandum on learning disabilities. But we never actually reviewed how we delivered the programs in our own provincial schools for children with severe learning disabilities. So, of course, we're having a look at the programs to make sure that we are providing the best service possible for all students with severe learning disabilities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's unfortunate that the Deputy Premier was laughing through my question, considering both schools named are in her city.

Ontarians are tired of hearing this government find any excuse to force schools to close. Now, they're even suspending enrolment at specialized schools to build their case.

My office has been inundated with emails from parents wondering why specialized demonstration schools are being told not to let any more children in, if the government is only consulting. Usually, you consult first before you make decisions that impact some of our most vulnerable kids.

Students are emailing me, devastated that schools designed to help them succeed could be shut down. Families deserve more access to quality education, not less.

So I ask again, will the Minister of Education ensure that no provincial or demonstration schools will be closed as a result of the consultations?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Of course, the process that we are going through right now is a consultation. We are talking to parents and students, and no decisions have been made at this point.

But what I can certainly say is that I agree with one thing that you said, which is that we need to ensure the best special education services for all students. That's exactly what we're looking at: How do we provide the best special education services for all children? That is my commitment.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of Transportation.

Last year, our government announced major investments in transit as part of budget 2015. By moving forward with our plan to unlock the value of certain public assets, we've been able to support those investments in transit infrastructure projects through our Moving Ontario Forward plan.

The residents of my community of Etobicoke–Lakeshore were extremely pleased to see our government announce a \$13.5-billion—I say "billion"—investment in improvements across the GO Transit network last year as part of this plan. This year's budget continues to build on these crucial investments.

Can the minister please tell the members of this House more about how budget 2016 will continue to build Ontario up?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for that fantastic question and for the wonderful job that he does not just representing his community, but as parliamentary assistant involved in economic development, employment and infrastructure.

As that member mentioned, last year our government announced unprecedented investments as part of budget 2015. This year, our budget builds on this important plan. As a first step to achieving regional express rail, we are already working to deliver a series of network-wide GO rail service improvements, including six new trips during the a.m. and p.m. for commutes on the Milton, Richmond Hill and Stouffville corridors; 10 new trips during off-peak hours on the Kitchener corridor, to and from Brampton; and 52 new trips on each weekend day on the Kitchener corridor, to and from Brampton, and the Barrie corridor, to and from Aurora.

This year, we are also announcing new and improved GO bus connections to the GO rail network for important communities like Cambridge and Brantford, along with a lot more.

I look forward to the supplementary answer, as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to thank the minister for his response. It's clear that our government continues

to put a great onus on investment in transit across the province.

But transit isn't the only type of infrastructure that is important in creating a connected transportation network in Ontario. Residents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore work and travel throughout the province, and they want to know that our government is committed to investing in our roads, bridges and highways throughout Ontario.

Can the minister please tell members of this House how this year's budget will help us build and maintain critical transportation infrastructure across the province?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: A very important second part to the story of budget 2016, as it relates to highways, roads and bridges: for example, the improvement on the Highway 417 Ottawa-Queensway corridor; the widening of nine kilometres of County Road 17 in the united counties of Prescott and Russell; and funding support for an additional ferry in the Kingston area.

This morning, I spent some time with the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, we announced the expansion and extension of Highway 427. This morning, that important project saw us standing in front of literally hundreds of skilled tradespeople, whose jobs and livelihoods will depend on this kind of investment from this government. The one question those skilled tradespeople asked that minister and myself is: Will Patrick Brown and Andrea Horwath stand up and support them and help us build Ontario up?

Interjections.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: He used our names, Speaker. You're supposed to use the ridings.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There's a reason I'm standing. The minister does know better. I want people to address people in this House with their titles or their ridings. It stays that way. I cannot let it slip.

New question.

ACCESSIBLE PARKING PERMITS

Mrs. Gila Martow: My question is to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

The Toronto Police Service "Abuse It and Lose It" campaign has come to an end with shocking results. They inspected over 1,500 accessible parking permits to make sure they were being used properly. They issued 862 parking tickets and confiscated the permits of 293 individuals who were then charged. That was all in just two weeks.

The Liberals have said that they were taking steps to combat this problem, yet the steps seem too slow. Will the minister work with the Minister of Community Safety to organize another blitz, perhaps this time outside of Toronto?

Hon. David Oraziotti: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. As you know, my staff is working with her and her office to speak about what she may be bringing forward in the Legislature in the form of a private member's bill with regard to a committee.

As I said earlier on this question, it is despicable that anyone in Ontario would use a permit that is not for them in the presence of an individual who has a disability, whether that is a visible disability or not.

One of the things I think we are finding, as the member knows full well, is that municipalities have decided that they would allow different areas where individuals can use these permits and they're not consistent across the province, and that's a municipal decision. But what we are also finding, as well, is that the enforcement is working, in that those parking permits that we are now putting forward, which are new and have greater security, will help us reduce the fraud in the system.

I'll have more to say in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Gila Martow: Again to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services: The "Abuse It and Lose It" campaign indicated a great need for enforcement and even more attention to accessible parking permit abuse. One in five permits inspected was being abused. The Toronto police did an amazing job here in Toronto.

What is the minister planning to do in order to crack down on accessible parking permit abuse across the province?

Hon. David Oraziotti: Just to add further to what I was saying a moment ago, with respect to the new permits, the standards have been increased. Bar codes are being added; specific identification is now being required to be provided to have those permits released.

I'm happy to review how individuals receive those permits. There are a variety of health care professionals in Ontario who have the authority to issue those. That's not a determination of our ministry. If it's believed that an individual needs those permits, there are health professionals who make that decision.

We want to make sure, though, that what is being granted, as the member opposite is highlighting, is a secure permit. We also have to be mindful that there is an enforcement element to this; that we need to ensure that individuals are not using these permits who should not be using the permits.

I'm committed to working with the member opposite to improve this system for all Ontarians.

L'UNIVERSITÉ DE L'ONTARIO FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités. Encore une fois, les galeries à Queen's Park sont remplies de jeunes francophones de partout en Ontario—bienvenue. Ces jeunes sont là, en partie, parce qu'ils ont eu accès à l'éducation en langue française dans des écoles dirigées, gouvernées et gérées pour et par des francophones.

Depuis le mois passé, le ministre a sur son bureau le rapport du comité consultatif chargé d'évaluer les capacités actuelles des établissements postsecondaires du Centre et du Sud-Ouest. Il a également le document synthèse découlant des États généraux sur le

postsecondaire. Ces deux rapports recommandent la mise en place de l'Université de l'Ontario français. Quand est-ce que le ministre va faire le premier pas et mettre en place le comité transitoire de gouvernance pour une Université de l'Ontario français?

1130

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

Le ministre?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I would like to thank the member for that question.

Access to French-language post-secondary education is of prime importance for our government. Currently, we have two universities in the province of Ontario that are bilingual. They offer courses in two languages, English and French: Laurentian University and the University of Ottawa. We have Glendon College at York University. We have two fully francophone colleges, Collège Boréal as well as La Cité in Ottawa.

We are not going to take a lesson from the NDP, when they created the Great Lakes College and then they shut it down. We are doing this very carefully.

Currently, we have 22,000 students that are studying in the French language in our universities and colleges. We are so proud of the good work that our colleges and universities are doing in terms of the provision of post-secondary education in the French language. We will continue our conversation with the stakeholders to make sure that French-language post-secondary education is available for our population and young people.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Monsieur le ministre, plusieurs des jeunes qui sont ici avec nous aujourd'hui à Queen's Park veulent aller à l'université. Plusieurs d'entre eux font partie des 2 000 inscriptions qu'on a déjà reçues pour l'Université de l'Ontario français. Le ministre sait très bien que ces jeunes-là manquent d'accès à des options postsecondaires en français en Ontario.

Pouvez-vous leur dire, à ces jeunes-là qui sont ici aujourd'hui avec nous, quand vous allez faire le premier pas vers l'Université de l'Ontario français? Est-ce que ce premier pas-là va être fait à temps pour qu'ils puissent aller à l'Université de l'Ontario français?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Minister responsible for francophone affairs.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Ça me fait plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue à nos étudiants qui sont ici aujourd'hui.

On ne peut pas trouver un gouvernement qui a appuyé autant la francophonie ici en Ontario. Le premier pas pour l'université francophone a été fait depuis longtemps. On n'attendra pas leurs conseils et leurs projets de loi vides de sens, mais on a un ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités qui est très engagé. Il y a un processus qui est déjà en place.

Est-ce que ceux qui sont en 11^e année ou 12^e année vont aller à l'université francophone? Je ne crois pas, parce qu'on ne mettra pas une université francophone demain, parce qu'on devra l'établir sur des bases très solides pour s'assurer de la pérennité de l'université francophone. On ne fera pas comme le Collège des

Grands Lacs qui a été mis sur pied sur le dos d'un « napkin » par les néo-démocrates et qui a été fermé par les conservateurs quelques années après.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Han Dong: My question today is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

I'm very proud to be part of a government that understands the importance of the north and the importance of the mining sector for our province. I know Ontario is the top jurisdiction in Canada for mineral exploration.

As many of us know, the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada will be holding its highly anticipated 2016 annual convention here in my riding of Trinity-Spadina this week.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Northern Development and Mines please update the House with respect to this annual convention and explain how it is showcasing Ontario's mining sector?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks to the member for Trinity-Spadina for giving me an opportunity to tell the members of the Legislature about the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada—better known as PDAC—conference starting this coming Sunday.

It's a remarkable gathering, with over 20,000 attendees from over 100 countries. It's an opportunity for us to showcase the many successes of the province's mining sector.

We will be kicking off PDAC with the annual Ontario reception this Sunday evening. We want to welcome every member of the Legislature to be there. We'll certainly be welcoming delegates, including municipal and industry leaders, First Nations, Métis and a whole bunch of others to a great event and we encourage everyone to attend.

The one thing we really want to make clear is that the province remains very much one of the most attractive destinations for mineral exploration investment in North America. In 2003, explorations were \$193 million; last year, they exceeded \$390 million—all good news. Great work—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: I thank the minister for his answer and the update, and thank him very much for the invitation to this weekend's reception.

Our province's mining sector is impressive. I'm certainly pleased that Ontario is hosting this important international conference. I know that the international delegates who are here will enjoy all that the city of Toronto has to offer.

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

Speaker, through you to the Minister: How is our government showcasing our support for such an important industry?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thanks very much again to the member for Trinity–Spadina. You said it so well. Our government is absolutely dedicated to maintaining, if not growing and improving a business climate that attracts investment into our province. There are some great opportunities.

I do think it's important to say that in our budget last week our government reconfirmed our commitment to the mining sector with the \$1 billion for infrastructure development in the Ring of Fire, which was huge. I was most grateful to see that. We also made a strong commitment to the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program, a program we made permanent last year, with a \$120-million investment every year, which is reducing energy costs for our major resource-based industries all across the north.

The fact is that Ontario remains the Canadian leader and one of the top jurisdictions in the world in exploration expenditures. We are going to keep doing the best job we can do to promote the mining sector, to build it up, create jobs and to build our economy up.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Acting Premier.

Since 1870, a provincial school for deaf and hearing-impaired students has had a home in the city of Belleville. On Tuesday, the Minister of Education said that enrolment at the school was healthy and that the ministry was looking at other schools to close. Yesterday, she told my local media that no decisions have been made on the future of these provincial and demonstration schools.

Why is the minister of mixed messages playing games with the education—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): First of all, the member knows that is not acceptable. He will correct himself and withdraw, then he'll ask his question.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

Why is the minister playing games with the education of deaf and hearing-impaired students? And will the government commit today to keeping the Sir James Whitney School open?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I am committed to keeping the Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf open. It has never been on the consultation list. The same is true for E.C. Drury School for the Deaf and the W. Ross Macdonald School for the blind. We have said from the very beginning that we are not consulting on those schools.

What we have said is that we are looking at CJL. In fact, the French Language Services Commissioner wrote a report on CJL a few years ago and asked us to review the whole governance issue at CJL, which is part of what we're looking at there.

As I explained earlier in question period, we are also looking at the whole issue of how we deliver services for the severely learning disabled.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: I thank the minister for confirming the Sir James Whitney school will remain open, but the government knows that Sagonaska Demonstration School, which operates on the same campus and same site, is in question—its future is in question. That school provides education for children with special needs who require more attention than other schools or other boards can provide. Parents of children with special needs, like phonological dyslexia, are being told that registration for their children is frozen for next year. They're worried that you're going to force their kids into programs and schools that aren't equipped to serve their special needs.

So my question for the minister is a simple one: Is she prepared to guarantee that Sagonaska Demonstration School will not close, and that our most vulnerable and deaf and hearing-impaired children will be able to get an education from one of these few schools in Ontario that actually is capable of meeting their special needs?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to confirm what the member said about the programs that are offered at the demonstration schools. I haven't had an opportunity to visit Sagonaska yet but it is on my to-do list to get there. Certainly in the demonstration schools, it is very clear that they provide an excellent program.

That's actually not the question. The question is, how do we best meet the needs of all children who have severe learning disabilities? Part of what I hear from parents is that they have not necessarily been well-served previously. That's exactly why we need to do a consultation on the programming, to make sure that we are serving the needs of all children who have severe learning disabilities.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from London–Fanshawe on a point of order.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to introduce dietitians from my city of London: Carol Morgan and Kim Sandiland. Welcome to the Legislature.

DEFERRED VOTES

SUPPORTING ONTARIO'S FIRST RESPONDERS ACT (POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER), 2016

LOI DE 2016 D'APPUI AUX PREMIERS INTERVENANTS DE L'ONTARIO (ÉTAT DE STRESS POST-TRAUMATIQUE)

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 163, An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 and the Ministry of Labour Act with

respect to posttraumatic stress disorder / *Projet de loi 163, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail et la Loi sur le ministère du Travail relativement à l'état de stress post-traumatique.*

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

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Members, please take your seats.

On February 22, 2016, Mr. Flynn moved second reading of Bill 163. All those in favour of the bill, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	French, Jennifer K.	Miller, Norm
Anderson, Granville	Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gravelle, Michael	Moridi, Reza
Arnott, Ted	Gretzky, Lisa	Munro, Julia
Bailey, Robert	Hardeman, Ernie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Baker, Yvan	Harris, Michael	Nicholls, Rick
Balkissoon, Bas	Hatfield, Percy	Oraziotti, David
Ballard, Chris	Hillier, Randy	Pettapiece, Randy
Barrett, Toby	Horwath, Andrea	Potts, Arthur
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bisson, Gilles	Hudak, Tim	Rinaldi, Lou
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Sandals, Liz
Brown, Patrick	Jones, Sylvia	Sattler, Peggy
Chan, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sergio, Mario
Coe, Lorne	Leal, Jeff	Singh, Jagmeet
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Smith, Todd
Crack, Grant	MacLaren, Jack	Sousa, Charles
Damerla, Dipika	Malhi, Harinder	Tabuns, Peter
Del Duca, Steven	Mangat, Amrit	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dickson, Joe	Martow, Gila	Vanthof, John
DiNovo, Cheri	Matthews, Deborah	Vernile, Daiene
Dong, Han	Mauro, Bill	Walker, Bill
Duguid, Brad	McDonell, Jim	Wong, Soo
Fedeli, Victor	McGarry, Kathryn	Yakabuski, John
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Eleanor	Yurek, Jeff
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David
Forster, Cindy	Meilleur, Madeleine	
Fraser, John	Milczyn, Peter Z.	

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

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 91; the nays are 0.

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

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to the order of the House dated March 2, 2016, the bill is ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

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

The House recessed from 1150 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to welcome students, parent volunteers and teachers from Withrow

public school in Toronto–Danforth who are here today. Colleagues, please be on your best behaviour.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Where were you this morning?

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BERT REITSMA

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I would like to give a statement in remembrance of Egbert Reitsma. Egbert Reitsma died on February 11. Bert lived in Fitzroy Harbour with his wife, Patricia, where they raised their children, Tricia and Greg. They also have seven grandchildren who they are very proud of.

Bert worked for Ontario Hydro for over 20 years and was a leader in his community, starting in his teenage years. He was a Boy Scout leader, president of the community association and a sports coach, organizer and referee. He was captain of the Fitzroy Township Volunteer Fire Department.

Bert enjoyed politics. He was a councillor in the township of West Carleton for 20 years and was an active member of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario.

In recognition of his many years of hard work and volunteerism, he received numerous awards, including the Queen's Jubilee Medal and Her Majesty's commemorative medal for Canada's 125th anniversary of Confederation, and he was West Carleton's Citizen of the Year in 1986.

Bert's family immigrated to Canada from Holland in 1950 when he was a young boy. Patricia told me that Bert believed that he had an obligation to give back to his country because Canada had given his family the opportunity to prosper. Bert Reitsma was a great Canadian.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I've got to ask the question: How much longer is the government of Ontario going to allow consumers across Ontario to be ripped off at the pumps? We have seen the price of oil by the barrel drop from over \$100 down to \$30, and less, a barrel, and we're still paying, in some cases, as much as a dollar a litre. There is no connection between the price at the pump and the price of the barrel. But it doesn't stop there. If you take a look at the price of gas per litre across this province, the differential in gas is anywhere from about 15 to 20 cents.

I looked this morning just to double-check a few communities, and this is what I saw: If you look at the city of Toronto, 80.9 cents per litre, but if you look at the city of Ottawa, 87 cents a litre. Are you going to tell me it costs seven cents a litre to move gas across and through Toronto to Ottawa? Well, how would you explain, then, that the price of gas in Timmins is 95.9 cents and the price of gas in Kenora is 83 cents? There's no correla-

tion. Clearly, the gas companies are gouging the public and taking advantage of the consumer.

We, as a Legislature, and the government of Ontario have the ability to regulate them so that the price of gas in this province can be regulated across the system so that no matter where you live—Kenora, Cornwall, Timmins or Toronto—the gas would be somewhat similar, and not a 15- or 20-cents-a-litre difference.

NEXXICE SYNCHRONIZED SKATING TEAMS

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm delighted to rise in the House today to recognize Nexxice synchronized skating, an organization based out of the Burlington skating club in my riding. With six teams ranging from beginner to senior, skaters of all ages train with Nexxice to compete at competitions from the regional to international level.

Recently I had the privilege of having the intermediate team perform at my second annual Family Day Fun Skate. There's nothing quite like watching this talented team of 16 young women elegantly glide across the ice in perfect unison. Coached by Jennifer Beauchamp-Crichton, the team performed to a swing theme, captivating the audience and setting the tone for what was a great afternoon on the ice.

Just weeks later, this same team, along with the Nexxice senior team, competed at the 2016 Skate Canada Synchronized Skating Championships in Waterloo last month. This competition brought together 40 teams and over 800 skaters from across Canada. As the nine-time national champions and reigning world champions, the Nexxice senior team came in second place after a great free program performance to Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody. The intermediate team placed second in their division as well.

I'd like to congratulate both of them for their efforts at the Skate Canada championships. As the senior team moves on to defend their world title, I'd like to ask my colleagues to join me in wishing them all the best as they prepare for the International Skating Union World Synchronized Skating Championships in Budapest, Hungary, this April.

COMPLEX REGIONAL PAIN SYNDROME

Mrs. Julia Munro: Today I rise to bring awareness to a rare disease that impacts constituents in my riding of York-Simcoe: complex regional pain syndrome. Today we are joined by some constituents from in and around my riding who suffer from this syndrome: Deborah Burton, Gidget Herbet and Janice Muccio. We are also joined by Deborah's husband, Ralph Hollander.

Complex regional pain syndrome is a chronic pain condition most often affecting one limb, usually after an injury or a trauma to that area. CRPS is believed to be caused by damage to or malfunction of the nervous system. The texture of the skin may change, sweat patterns

may be impacted, and hair and nail growth patterns may be altered. The joints may be stiff, muscle movement decreased, and the limb may have a tremor. Described as an invisible pain, it has been described as a burning sensation that can have a physiological and psychological impact on those suffering with the disease. Anyone can get CRPS—men and women of all ages; however, it is most common among middle-aged women.

All too often, those with rare diseases get left behind in our health care system. An estimated one in 12 Canadians are impacted by a rare disease, either as a parent, family member, caregiver or friend. Defined as a disease impacting fewer than one in 2,000 people, it is time for a strategy.

Today we will be voting on my colleague Michael Harris's private member's bill, which is dedicated to treating rare disease. I am looking forward to voting in support of his motion, and I hope that my colleagues in all caucuses will do the same.

HYDRO ONE

Ms. Jennifer K. French: What do more than 80% of Ontarians, nearly 200 municipalities, all eight independent officers of the Legislature and business leaders across the province have in common? They all oppose the government's short-sighted sell-off of Hydro One. It's something I've heard across my community, from doorstep to town halls. Ontarians are sending the message loud and clear that they don't want the Premier to sell Hydro One, but she isn't listening.

Fortunately, people in Oshawa don't give up that easily. I hold in my hand here 70 letters that I've received from people in Oshawa and the Durham region, and they're calling on the Premier to stop the sale of Hydro One. They all share the same message: "I did not give you permission to sell Hydro One or any other public utility or publicly owned asset on my behalf."

Let's not forget, Speaker, what "public" means. The Premier has taken it to mean "government property for her to do with as she pleases," but I have 70 letters here that disagree, and there are thousands more across the province that are fighting tooth and nail as well. It's an important message, one that the Premier should hear.

Since these letters are addressed to the Premier, I will ask that a page please put these 70 letters on her desk because I want to make sure that she receives them. The people of Ontario have spoken. The people of Oshawa have spoken. Let's hope that the Premier decides to listen.

BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: This past Friday, I had the opportunity to join business leaders from west Northumberland at the Business Achievement Awards in Cobourg. These awards are presented in partnership with the town of Cobourg and the Northumberland Central Chamber of Commerce. They recognize local businesses in Cobourg,

Hamilton township and Alnwick/Haldimand township who are leaders in their fields and exemplify business excellence.

1310

This year's award winners—and I want to congratulate them—are United Way Northumberland for the non-profit sector, Curves Cobourg for health and wellness, Boston Pizza for hospitality and tourism, Lorenz Conveying Products for manufacturing, Barrett's Christmas Tree Farm for retail, Lakeland Multi-trade for skilled trades, Keep on Rolling professional painting services for a new start-up, Watershed Magazine for communication and technology, and Mayhew Graphics for business and consumer services.

Joan Chalovich received the James Crossen Lifetime Achievement Award, Chris Pelletier received the Chamber Chair's Award and Chem-Ecol received the prestigious Mayor's Award.

Small and medium businesses are the backbone of economic growth in our province. They are the ones that provide jobs for Ontarians and help build strong, vibrant communities. I'm delighted we're investing \$2.7 million in the Jobs and Prosperity Fund and continuing the Eastern Ontario Development Fund. I'm very excited about these people, and I want to congratulate them all.

RÉSEAU DES FEMMES PARLEMENTAIRES

M^{me} Gila Martow: Je veux parler un petit peu de la conférence internationale la semaine passée. C'était le Réseau des femmes parlementaires. C'était une sous-réunion, vraiment, pour l'Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie. J'ai passé quelques journées à Tanger, Maroc, avec deux de mes collègues : Sophie Kiwala, la libérale qui est ici maintenant, et France Gélinas. On a aussi voyagé avec John Anderson. C'est le directeur du protocole.

J'ai parlé un peu. J'ai fait une exposition sur l'analphabétisme des femmes, et c'est surtout des immigrants au nord de l'Ontario qui peut-être ont besoin d'un peu d'assistance ici à l'Assemblée.

On a discuté de beaucoup de choses pour donner une meilleure qualité de vie aux femmes. On a discuté de l'éducation, de l'élimination de la pauvreté, de l'égalité et du mariage des jeunes filles.

J'ai aussi visité quelques membres de la communauté juive au Maroc : Sonia Cohen Toledano et Aron Abikzer. Ce sont des amis de Simon Keslassy, de mon comté. Il est le président de la Communauté Juive Marocaine de Toronto. On a visité quelques synagogues et aussi un cimetière.

TAMARA JAWORSKA

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I rise today to speak about the iconic Polish Canadian artist Tamara Jaworska, who died in her 97th year on October 29, 2015.

Ms. Jaworska was a contemporary tapestry weaver who was recognized by her peers as being a virtuoso in technique and style of modern tapestry. In the late 1940s, Ms. Jaworska studied painting at the Polish State Academy of Fine Art in Lodz. She was awarded a master's degree and then went on to teach at that school for many years.

In 1969, Ms. Jaworska and her husband, Tad Jaworski, a noted filmmaker, immigrated to Toronto to escape censorship and repression by the communist regime in Poland. As a new Canadian, she found inspiration in Canadian nature and landscape, and created abstract and realistic compositions. One of her most notable works, called the "Unity of Canada" tapestry, was hung in the Place Bell Canada lobby in Ottawa. Her artistic legacy has been displayed in museums, Canadian embassies, galleries and private collections in Canada and across the world.

Ms. Jaworska was elected a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, a prestigious opponent to the centre national de tapisserie d'Aubusson in Paris, and she is a member of the Order of Canada. She was described as one of Canada's proudest cultural treasures. We mourn her loss but celebrate her artistic legacy.

REFUGEE HUB

Mr. Arthur Potts: Last month, I had the pleasure to join Mary-Margaret McMahon, a local councillor, at the Danforth East Community Association and the organizers of East Toronto Families for Syria for the grand opening of a refugee hub in Beaches–East York.

The hub is a very special place, located just two doors down from my constituency office on Danforth Avenue. There, Syrian refugees come to the hub to find free household items, clothing, school supplies and other necessities that make settling here in Canada that much easier. The hub is staffed and supplied entirely by local volunteers, many of whom are local members and families, and every item in the store is either donated or purchased with donated funds. Over the past few weeks, they've provided household essentials, including small appliances and food, to over 230 local refugee families.

The organization and the efficiency of East Toronto Families for Syria would make an excellent model for other communities to emulate. Not only do they coordinate donations; they've connected newcomers with services that will help them find jobs and education resources in our community.

The generosity of my constituents, and indeed of all people across the province, has been remarkable, and the compassion they have shown to so many strangers should be commended. The centre is only open on a part-time basis, so my office has become a place where people can bring donations. When they do open up, they come by and pick it up so they can distribute it.

What I would encourage is that all members of this House go to Facebook and check out East Toronto Families for Syria so they can get a better sense of this wonderful work that they're doing in my community.

MOTIONS

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding government order number 42.

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

Deputy House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I move that when government order number 42 is next called, the Speaker shall put the question immediately without further debate or amendment; and

That in the case of a recorded division, the division bells be limited to five minutes and the vote may be deferred, pursuant to standing order 28(h).

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bradley moves that when government order number 42 is next called, the Speaker shall put—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispense. Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL LITERACY WEEK

Hon. Jeff Leal: I rise in the House today in recognition of Canadian Agricultural Literacy Week, which takes place this year from February 28 to March 5.

Now in its fifth year, Canadian Agricultural Literacy Week encourages students in classrooms across the country to celebrate and learn about this very important industry. It is important that people in our cities and towns know about the vital role that Ontario's agri-food sector plays in their everyday lives. Supporting our agri-food sector is a key priority for our government. We're working with our industry partners to ensure that our farmers and food processors continue to be successful and that Ontarians know the important role they play in making the province's economy strong and, indeed, competitive.

I want to take a moment to recognize some of our dedicated partners who are building awareness on the importance of our agriculture and food system. With support from our government, organizations like Ontario Agri-Food Education have made it their mission to teach students about farming and where their food comes from. Last year alone, Ontario Agri-Food Education teacher ambassadors delivered 185 interactive classroom lessons focusing on a variety of agricultural and food themes across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize the honourable member for Huron-Bruce, in terms of promotion of agriculture education and literacy related to her private member's bill that she introduced in this Legislature some time ago.

They also offer student tours, education exhibits and workshops to help students gain knowledge and understanding of agri-food topics. These teacher ambassadors also support events and organizations through classroom lessons, student tours, education exhibits and workshops.

I also want to thank Farm and Food Care Ontario, an organization that runs a number of innovative programs and workshops to help raise local food awareness by connecting farmers to non-farming audiences.

1320

I also want to thank the Dietitians of Canada and the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association for helping to raise awareness of local food among students through the Fresh from the Farm initiative. Since 2013, nearly 300 schools have participated in this very innovative program, helping schools raise funds by selling local apples, carrots, onions and potatoes within their communities, just like my community of Peterborough, while teaching children about where the produce comes from. Last year was bigger than ever, with students selling more than 465,000 pounds of Ontario produce, nearly triple the volume from a year earlier. I can't wait to see how the program continues to grow in 2016.

Mr. Speaker, a big part of agricultural literacy week and a priority of our government is promoting the healthy, high-quality food that Ontarians have access to right here in Ontario. Our government recognizes this need, and it introduced and passed the Local Food Act in order to support and celebrate the hard work of Ontario farmers and to make it easier for Ontarians to choose local food wherever they are. We need to educate and encourage young Ontarians to embrace fresh, seasonal produce so they can experience the delicious corn, asparagus, broccoli and tomatoes that we grow right here in Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we all should be aware of the high demand now for French's ketchup in the province of Ontario. In fact, they can't supply the market. This is the story: I was in Leamington a short time ago to see the rise-again of the old Heinz operation in Leamington—now Highbury Canco—doing tomato ketchup for French's, and they cannot supply the market here in Ontario. That's a good-news story that we all embrace in this Legislature.

Part of this comes from promoting farmers' markets and continuing to support the venues that allow Ontarians to experience and taste food that is grown in their community. I want to thank now-Senator Bob Runciman. Ten years ago, he brought forward a private member's bill for fruit wines at farmers' markets. We have now been able to deliver on his idea from a decade ago.

It might be hard to believe after the February we've just had, but we should also be sharing the successes of our remarkable greenhouse sector, which is able to

produce lettuce, cucumbers, peppers and other vegetables through the winter months. In fact, you can grow a cucumber from a flower to a mature cucumber in exactly 10 days.

Mr. Speaker, local food isn't just about fresh ingredients; it's also about offering busy families high-quality prepared food using ingredients from Ontario farms, such as Campbell's soups or French's ketchup.

By helping our children understand and appreciate the value and importance of Ontario's farmers, local food and food processors, we're helping to build a better Ontario. We'll continue to work collaboratively with our partners to ensure that the next generation knows about the important role that agriculture plays in our lives and the range of high-quality, locally produced foods that we grow right here in Ontario, year-round.

I want to encourage all colleagues on all sides of the House to take a moment, not only this week but throughout the year, to visit a farm or farmers' market and have a conversation with family members or co-workers about the food we eat and where it comes from.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's time for responses.

Mr. Toby Barrett: It's a pleasure to say a few words about Canadian Agricultural Literacy Week, running February 28 to March 5, as we just heard.

It's a concept that's so important. So many of our residents in Ontario are two, three or more generations removed from the farm. Many of us may or may not—tofu, for example, comes from soybeans. It's a two-way street, and I can attest that many soybean farmers down my way don't eat tofu; they don't eat the product that they produce. So it's truly a two-way street. There has to be this communication back and forth.

In various whipped toppings, much of the main ingredient can be vegetable oil. I just assumed dairy, myself. It's white and kind of fluffy and what have you. Vegetable oil is also used in soap, skin products and perfume. I grew up on a corn farm, and it's just astounding, the products that come from field corn: the starch used in aspirin, for example. So it's much broader than just food, much deeper than that, the products that are used for fibre and pharmaceuticals, and the value-added side that is also so important right across Ontario and right across Canada.

Agri-Food Canada indicated that the sector generates \$106 billion a year, 6.7% of Canada's gross domestic product, and employs 2.2 million people right across our country. That's one in eight jobs. It's very important for the economy alone, and certainly our Ontario economy.

I think that if we knew more about agriculture, there would probably be a bit more of an outcry about the recent cut to the budget. We lost \$28 million. The Local Food Fund, I understand, has wrapped up, although we were recently told by the minister that it has gone over to the greenbelt people. I don't know where that leaves us in Windsor or the Slate River Valley, or up in Thunder Bay, Timiskaming, and northeastern Ontario. So much of our agri-business stretches from the Michigan border right

across to the Quebec border. It's certainly not limited to the greenbelt.

I had lunch today and noticed in the cafeteria that the bright sign that is lit up, down at the sandwich bar, was advertising, asking all of us to take a 100-meal journey. I think this is in March. During the month of March, on average, we'll eat about 100 meals. It's asking us to think about vegetables, drink more water—

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett:—some of us should have smaller portions, if that's what I heard said over there—and fruit instead of candy, things like that.

I had breakfast this morning. I joined the dietitians downstairs and met a couple of what I refer to as "Mac girls." I graduated from OAC, the Ontario Agricultural College, and there were reasons for us guys to go over to Macdonald Hall. Anyway, the dietitians: Man, they filled me in years ago on what is in food and what should be in food.

This is a very important phone number. It's almost like Telehealth. I met a young lady there. She mans the phone. It's EatRight Ontario. You can pick up the phone any time, or maybe during business hours—I'm not sure—and ask any questions about what it is you're eating or what's in that box. Here's the number: 1-877-510-510-2. Just dial the number and see if it works. Anyway, it's just a phone call away.

I guess my last comment: We talk about the importance of ag literacy in the schools, elementary and high school. I took a full-blown agriculture course in high school—grades 9, 10, 11 and 12. I studied agriculture and ag economics at Guelph. I had the honour and the pleasure to teach agriculture at the high school level—grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, in the four-year and five-year streams. We've lost that in so many of our schools.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to rise in the House. Today, on behalf of my colleagues and my leader, Andrea Horwath, I pay tribute to Canadian Agricultural Literacy Week. This is the fifth annual week, and we should thank the people who try to teach our kids what agriculture is truly about, people like the Ontario agricultural—OAFE. I know them as OAFE.

Coming from a farm, I just had this illusion that most kids knew about agriculture. I came from a farm community, and we all talked about agriculture. My first real taste of why we needed it was at the 2009 plowing match, when we helped with the education tent. We had 9,000 kids come through that tent. That's when it struck me how important a role these people play in teaching.

1330

That's actually when I met the member from Huron—Bruce, who worked with me in that endeavour, and we both continue to work on teaching kids about agriculture. I think for all the people who are involved in this, it's a very worthy endeavour.

Today, I would like to stray a little bit. There's another problem that agriculture faces, and it's not literacy so much; it's comprehension. You can read something, but

you might not be able to understand it; or you might be able to say something from notes, but you might not be able to understand what you're saying. My example is that when the Premier became Minister of Agriculture and she challenged agriculture to create 120,000 jobs, I was happy about that because I thought, "Okay, she doesn't know a lot about agriculture, but she recognizes the potential." There were a lot of people saying, "Oh, she shouldn't be minister." I thought, no; she could learn a lot.

The fact that she recognizes there's so much potential is a good thing. But in my mind, as a farmer, I thought, "Okay, so if you want to grow, you need the tools to grow." If I'm going to work more land, I need a bigger cultivator. If I'm going to grow the industry, I need tools. That is where this government is failing. They don't comprehend agriculture, because for us to reach goals like they are setting—and farmers set goals of growth every day for themselves and so do food processors; so do food retailers—they need the tools.

One of these tools would have been an increase in the Risk Management Program, which is capped; that would have been a tool. Obviously, this government doesn't fully comprehend agriculture, because they didn't move on that.

I'll give you another example: The government introduced regulations on neonicotinoid insecticides. We're not opposed to that. We should have a robust regulation system for pesticides, but it's got to be a robust system that works. Once again, the government didn't seem to comprehend that, because as we speak, farmers and crop consultants are telling me that the forms you have to fill out for your planting intentions have changed not once, not twice, not three times—

Interjection: Four times.

Mr. John Vanthof: Four times. I was going to say four and a half, but that's not right.

That's a sign of a government not understanding, not comprehending, what they're doing regarding agriculture, because these regulations do impact the competitiveness of that sector. When you put forward a regulation—and they have the right to do that—that impacts the competitiveness of a sector, you would think that they would also put forward programs that would mitigate that. Again, no, they don't.

They challenged us to create jobs, but they put roadblocks in front of the sector to actually stop jobs. Again, it takes a lot to comprehend agriculture.

In my final few minutes: You want to boost agriculture? Here's a novel concept: How about broadband Internet in rural Ontario? You want to keep young people in rural Ontario? A novel concept: You know it would be nice if you could actually use your iPad, because farmers need stuff like that. There are a lot of people in rural Ontario who are happy to have dial-up. We talk about giving agriculture the tools for 120,000 jobs. Give the sector the tools, and they will create the jobs. But don't just talk about it.

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

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I'm affixing my signature to this very, very heavy petition.

RURAL SCHOOLS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a petition called "To Preserve Community Schools.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas it is right for Ontario youth to be educated in their home communities;

"Whereas accessible schools that students can walk, bike or take a short ride to promote healthy lifestyles, a cleaner environment and emotional well-being;

"Whereas the economies of smaller rural towns are directly strengthened and vitalized by high schools in their own communities;

"Whereas community schools best serve special populations;

"Whereas rural high schools more than 15 km from the next high school should be considered eligible for enhanced top-up funding;

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

"To direct support and resources to Ontario rural community schools, such as Harrow District High School, so as to provide and sustain accessible education for youth within their home communities, preserving and sustaining rural town culture that diversifies the fabric of the province of Ontario."

I agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to Delaney from the town of Leamington, not far from Harrow, to take to the desk.

HOME INSPECTION INDUSTRY

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

“Whereas the home inspector industry remains largely unregulated; and

“Whereas homeowners are increasingly reliant on home inspectors to make an educated home purchase; and

“Whereas the unregulated industry poses a risk to consumers;

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

“To protect consumers by regulating the home inspection industry and licensing home inspectors.”

I agree with the petition, affix my signature and give it to Bianca to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Lorne Coe: “Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I agree with this petition. I affix my signature to it now, and provide it to Luke.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Michael Mantha: “Whereas quality care for the 77,000 residents of long-term-care ... homes is a priority for many Ontario families;

“Whereas over the last 10 years 50% of Ontario’s hospital-based complex continuing care beds have been closed by the provincial government; and, there has been a 29.7% increase in the acuity level of LTC residents and 73% of LTC residents in Ontario suffer from some form of Alzheimer’s or dementia;

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in long-term-care homes keeps pace with residents’ increasing acuity and a growing number of residents with complex behaviours such as dementia and Alzheimer’s;

“Whereas there is extensive evidence that a care standard can result in increased staff levels, which translates into improved quality of care for residents;

“Whereas for over a decade several Ontario coroner’s inquests into nursing deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and increase in staffing levels;

“Whereas the Ontario Liberal government first promised a legislated care standard for residents in the province’s long-term-care homes in 2003 but in 2013” and on, “they have yet to make good on their promise;

“Whereas the Long-Term Care Homes Act (2007) empowers the provincial government to create a minimum standard—but falls short of actually creating one;

1340

“Whereas the most detailed and reputable study of minimum care standards recommends 4.1 hours of direct care per day; and

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

“(1) An amendment must be made to the Long-Term Care Homes Act (2007) for a legislated care standard of a minimum four hours per resident each day adjusted for acuity level and case mix;

“(2) The province must increase funding in order for long-term-care homes to achieve a staffing and care standard and tie public funding for homes to the provision of quality care and staffing levels that meet the legislated minimum care standard of four hours;

“(3) To ensure accountability the province must make public reporting of staffing levels at each Ontario LTC home mandatory;

“(4) The province must immediately provide funding for specialized facilities for persons with cognitive impairment who have been assessed as potentially aggressive, and staff them with sufficient numbers of appropriately trained workers;

“(5) The province must stop closing complex continuing care beds and alternative-level-of-care beds to end the downloading of hospital patients with complex medical conditions to long-term-care homes.”

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and present it to page Charlotte to bring down to the Clerks’ table.

LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Cristina Martins: A hard act to follow there. I’ve a petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas lung disease affects 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario;

“Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes), lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

“In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in

direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

“One in five Ontario schoolchildren has asthma;

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

“To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry’s private member’s bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a lung health advisory council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues; and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario lung health action plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

“Once debated at committee to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage.”

I agree with this petition, will affix my name and send it to the table with page Dhruv.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

I agree with this petition wholeheartedly. I’ll sign it and send it to the table with Jordan.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition entitled “Hydro One Not for Sale!” It reads as follows:

“Whereas the provincial government is creating a privatization scheme that will lead to higher hydro rates, lower reliability, and hundreds of millions” of dollars “less for our schools, roads, and hospitals; and

“Whereas the privatization scheme will be particularly harmful to northern and First Nations communities; and

“Whereas the provincial government is creating this privatization scheme under a veil of secrecy that means Ontarians don’t have a say on a change that will affect their lives dramatically; and

“Whereas it is not too late to cancel the scheme;

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

“That the province of Ontario immediately cancel its scheme to privatize Ontario’s Hydro One.”

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

LUNG HEALTH

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

“Whereas lung disease affects 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario;

“Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

“In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

“One in five Ontario schoolchildren has asthma;

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

“To allow for deputations on ... private member’s bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a lung health advisory council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues; and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario lung health action plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

“Once debated at committee to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through” third reading, and to ask and “seek royal assent immediately upon its passage.”

I agree with it, affix my signature, and send it with Laura down to the table.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas Ontario’s growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

“Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

“Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients’ access to quality care in the years to

come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

“The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario’s doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario’s families deserve.”

I have affixed my signature as well, Mr. Speaker.

ÉDUCATION POSTSECONDAIRE EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Une pétition pour l’Université de l’Ontario français :

« Entendu que le 10 février le RÉFO, l’AFO et la FESFO ont présenté le rapport du Sommet provincial des États généraux sur le postsecondaire en Ontario français;

« Entendu que le rapport a indiqué un besoin et un désir pour une université de langue française;

« Entendu que le 26 mai, 2015 la députée France Gélinas a présenté un projet de loi pour créer cette université;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario comme suit : de commencer la création de l’Université de l’Ontario français dès que possible. »

J’appuie cette pétition, et je vais demander à la page Delaney de l’amener à la table des greffiers.

LUNG HEALTH

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition here. I’ve been getting these in from across Ontario. It’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas lung disease affects 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario;

“Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

“In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than \$4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than \$80 billion seven short years from now;

“One in five Ontario schoolchildren has asthma;

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

“To allow for deputations on ... private member’s bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a lung health advisory council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues; and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario lung health action plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

“Once debated at committee to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through” its third reading “and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage.”

I agree with the petition, affix my name and send it down to the table with Micah.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ PUBLIC BUSINESS

RARE DISEASES

Mr. Michael Harris: I move that, in the opinion of this House, a select committee on diagnosis and treatment funding for patients with rare diseases should be appointed to consider and report to the House its observations and recommendations with respect to the urgent need for a comprehensive strategy to address the issues patients of all rare diseases are facing in the province of Ontario when accessing necessary care and treatment.

1350

The committee should review the report of the Ontario Citizens’ Council regarding funding for drugs for rare diseases that was presented to the Ontario drug program in 2010 and review the effectiveness of the draft framework from when it was first introduced in 2011. The committee should also review the coordination of delivery of funding for diagnosis and treatment for rare diseases (DRDs) across provincial ministries and agencies; and that in developing its strategy and recommendations, the committee should focus on the following issues:

—the current definition that is used for rare diseases in Ontario;

—training of medical professionals to both effectively diagnose and provide appropriate referrals and treatment options for rare diseases;

—the need for a provincial research and drug development strategy for rare diseases;

—the alignment of available clinical data, best-practice guidelines and funding criteria;

—the Transparent Drug System for Patients Act and any changes that are necessary to better support Ontarians with rare diseases;

—the implementation of the Compassionate Review Policy for DRDs;

—the need for a committed funding envelope specific for DRDs;

—the Health Insurance Act regulations and out-of-country services program for possible improvements to allow more timely access to necessary treatment whether in or out of province;

—the Assistive Devices Program and related funding to ensure urgent needs for equipment required by those with rare disease are met;

—Ontario respite care programs and suitability to meet the needs of those impacted by rare disease; and

—any further government-funded supports for families and caregivers struggling to meet the care needs of those suffering with rare disease.

That the committee shall meet on Wednesdays following routine proceedings until 6 p.m.; and

That the committee is authorized to meet at the call of the Chair but must recess during the oral question period when meeting at Queen's Park; and

That the committee shall have the authority to travel within Ontario; and

That the committee should present an interim report to the House no later than September 30, 2016, and a final report no later than December 31, 2016; and

That in the event of, and notwithstanding, any prorogation of the House before the presentation of the committee's final report, the committee should be deemed to be continued to the subsequent session or sessions and may continue to meet during any such prorogation; and

That, notwithstanding standing order 113(a), the committee shall be composed of six members from the government, one of whom shall be the Chair, two members from the official opposition, one of whom shall be the Vice-Chair, and one member from the third party;

That the chief whip of each of the recognized parties should indicate in writing to the Clerk of the House their party's membership on the committee by March 10, 2016.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Harris has moved private member's notice of motion number 63. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. It's truly an honour to stand here today on behalf of the one in 12 people of Ontario who suffers with one of the close to 7,000 rare diseases—diseases with acronyms like CCHS, PAH, PKU, EDS and aHUS, and names like alpha-1, Duchenne muscular dystrophy and Angelman syndrome—the list goes on.

Today, I stand united with those rare disease sufferers who came to this morning's press conference, those packing the galleries today, those I met over the last months of cross-province round tables and those suffering in isolation throughout Ontario. Together, we stand united in a call for action in support of my private member's motion to strike an all-party select committee into rare disease diagnosis, treatment and support.

It's been well over a year since I began my own journey in learning about the unique, yet shared, challenges faced by those rare disease patients across Ontario. Having no personal or family connection to rare disease concerns, it was the stories of patients who are forced to come here to Queen's Park to plead with legislators for the treatment and support we all would expect and deserve in Ontario—stories that were shared by people like Madi Vanstone and the stories that soon came directly into my office when a Kitchener friend, Anne Bilodeau, contacted me to detail the unfunded treatment and life-threatening crisis faced by her friend, aHUS patient Johann Kerlow.

Once I began writing letters and digging into the issues surrounding rare diseases in the province, I soon learned that these stories were only the beginning. The more I learned, the more I realized that we couldn't just sit idly by and allow the challenges faced by those suffering to go unaddressed. Bottom line: I was sick of seeing those who were suffering coming to Queen's Park and coming into my office when there was nothing I could do about it.

Well, there was something. There is something we can all do about it, in fact, as Ontarians and as provincial representatives. I know I'm not alone. I'm sure we've all heard from patients who have contacted our offices or made the trip to Queen's Park to urge the government to provide specific, often life-saving, treatments. The message from these patients and those I have since met from across the province, as I'm sure you have heard in your own ridings, is that we in government are a last resort. The majority of these patients are coming to us as legislators because they have run out of options and they are desperate for our assistance. They're coming to us after years of misdiagnosis; after being told, "It's all in your head"; after being prevented access to life-saving treatment; after being refused vital life-enhancing equipment; and after watching their families beg and borrow, remortgage or even sell their homes to afford treatment. They're coming to us after spending too many dark days and nights suffering in relative solitude without the support networks available to those with a more common disease.

While rare or orphan diseases may only affect a small percentage of the population, their impact is so much more. These are people of Ontario deserving of access to medical treatments we all deserve as residents of this province. Their small numbers shouldn't mean the government can go along ignoring their suffering.

Today, we have the opportunity to finally address what governments have failed to address for far too long. We have the opportunity to join together in a united response to support our #TreatRareDisease campaign and, more specifically, to support our call for an all-party select committee to hear from experts, medical professionals, sufferers and their families, and use that first-hand experience to develop meaningful, lasting recommendations for the treatment of rare disease here in the province of Ontario.

In the last year alone, I've sponsored a media studio for families suffering from a series of rare diseases whose challenges are unique and yet shared, families whose heart-wrenching stories cry out for the government's attention and action. And yet, despite words of understanding from government when they are on their doorsteps, they continue to wait for support. Again, it was hearing these stories from the patients who I feel are the experts in many of these cases that prompted me to launch my #TreatRareDisease campaign and today's motion.

In recent months, instead of forcing patients to come here to share their stories, I felt it was time to go to them.

Over a series of visits I made from Ajax to Windsor, from Sudbury to Ottawa and Brockville, from Hamilton and Kitchener, the stories I heard directly from patients only further supported the series of factors I'm asking the all-party select committee to consider.

In our first stop in Ajax, where we were hosted by the Carion Fenn Foundation, we heard from alpha-1 patient Tom Leckie, who suffered from a collapsed lung and liver. Tom is a survivor. He will be on anti-rejection drugs for the rest of his life.

In Ottawa, we heard of the difficulty surrounding misdiagnosis, where an EDS sufferer was prescribed antidepressants instead of getting an x-ray that may have led to a more proper diagnosis. She indicated that it was the journey to be diagnosed that was the most frustrating.

It was also in Ottawa where I heard one of the most troubling and yet brutally honest statements since I started this campaign, when the wife of an alpha-1 patient addressed the challenge of access to treatment for rare disease patients. She told us that had he been diagnosed with a cancer, he would have been inside the system and would have had the access to treatment and supports that remain out of reach. You can stop for a second and think of what struggle and hurdles one must have experienced to make that type of statement. It really puts the entire issue into a heart-wrenching perspective, to think that they would have rather had cancer than the rare disease that they happen to have.

1400

In Hamilton, we heard of the need for research into a cure for Angelman syndrome, a rare congenital disorder leading to mental disability, when Kathryn Nicholls told of the challenges faced by her young daughter, Alyssa. They remain waiting for a cure that medical experts believe is well within reach but, due to its rarity, lacks the necessary research support.

In Kitchener, access to medication was again a key concern to Sue Thomas, mother of Jason, a 23-year-old whose life took a sudden U-turn when he was diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy at the age of 19. I know that Jason may be watching today, and I want to thank him for sharing his story. Jason, who relies on a wheelchair and will never be able to eat again due to the continuing throat issues and lung infections, is his own best advocate in the twitterverse @jasonsWHEELS, where you can learn more about his work to champion vital medications that are difficult to access here in the province.

Patients weren't only sharing their stories at our tour stops. They were also writing them and sharing them on our website, treatrareisease.ca. I continue to encourage my colleagues to log on and read through the concerns and challenges faced by rare disease sufferers throughout the province. You'll read about Windsor's Jon Brentnall, who lost his mother after she suffered from an undiagnosed, serious bacterial skin infection that spreads quickly and kills the body's soft tissue: necrotizing fasciitis. He tells us, "No medical scans were done to diagnose properly." The doctor told her to take an

antibiotic and that she should notice a difference by morning and dismissed her. "Rest in peace, Mum," Jon wrote.

Leamington's Donna Coulter was one of a handful who told us of the excruciating situation faced by those with complex regional pain syndrome, also known as the "suicide disease." She is one of many advocating for desperately needed education and research and assistance to those suffering.

Speaker, the stories go on. There are so many who have suffered so long in relative silence that once they are given the opportunity to share their unique challenges they are grateful to understand that their elected representatives are finally listening. It is because of these compelling stories that I believe that working together through the select committee open public process will prove to be the best route to hear from patients, their families, and experts in the medical community to try to come up with a solution to help these families.

With that said, I think it's important, as we look to push forward the select committee approach, that we do register our appreciation for the Minister of Health's announcement earlier this week to acknowledge the need to address the challenges facing rare disease sufferers. And while the minister's announced working group provides one step in the search for answers, the select committee process I'm calling for will provide the transparent public forum and discussion that will lead to the concrete answers and province-wide strategy patients deserve.

Speaker, we are all well acquainted with the success of past all-party select committees in bringing long-hidden issues to the fore and leading to informed and essential recommendations dealing with difficult concerns that demand government attention. I think of the success of select committees on developmental services and on mental health and addictions, and the recent work of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment.

Select committees provide the transparent, open forum required to deal with these issues that have, for far too long, remained hidden. Without a select committee, these discussions go on behind closed doors. That's where it has been for years and that's not what is helping patients.

Too many times we've seen announcements of government intentions to address these issues and too many times we've seen them little more than a practice in spinning wheels. It has been five years since the government received the Ontario Citizens' Council report on rare disease, and five years later we've seen no action.

I've learned first-hand over the last year that, when it comes to rare disease, the real experts are the patients. Our government needs to hear from them. If we walk away today, we're caught in the same waiting game we've been trapped in for far too long now. Bottom line: The select committee approach will deliver the transparent public forum that rare disease sufferers deserve to complement the recent provincial acknowledgement of the need for attention. It's my sincere hope that we can assist the efforts of the minister through this all-party select committee.

Today, we have an opportunity to build on the minister's announcements by supporting the open, all-party select committee process. But to be very clear, should MPPs choose to stand against this afternoon's motion for an all-party select committee into rare disease treatment, they will be turning their backs on the transparent public process and recommendations that these patients are calling on you to support. So I'm standing with them today to ask that you don't turn your back on them. It is a truly bipartisan issue that crosses party lines. I look forward to the support to push forward this important initiative and finally give rare disease sufferers the support they so dearly deserve.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is a pleasure for me to add my voice to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga's and to congratulate him on the #TreatRareDisease campaign. He covered a lot of what I had the intention to cover.

Basically, those are people without a voice. They have a rare disease. There are not a whole lot of them out there. Most of them have a gut-wrenching story to tell before they finally got diagnoses. Once they get there, sometimes there is relief and sometimes there isn't. But all of them have suffered in silence for a long time.

Finally, the wind seems to be shifting a little bit. People are interested in reaching out to those rare disease sufferers and seeing that, if we put our time, effort, energy and brainpower together, maybe we could do something to help them and maybe we can do something to help all of us. This is what the member is trying to do.

I had the privilege to sit on the Select Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. I come from 25 years in health care. I'm glad to see that the Chair of that committee is here today. When I started work on that committee, I came with my health provider's set of eyes and ears to it. But I quickly realized that this is not what people wanted; they wanted to have an opportunity to come and talk to politicians and talk to their government as to how things could be made better. I think we made some pretty good all-party unanimous recommendations.

Just the fact that we had the select committee, the fact that we travelled the province, the fact that we gave close to 300 people and families the opportunity to be heard, to share their story, to tell us how we had failed them and to tell us how we could do things better: This, in itself, I am convinced, helped change the conversation about mental health and helped to bring it to where it is now, where it is a whole lot more open.

We have the opportunity to do the same thing with rare diseases. We have an opportunity to let every Ontarian know that they exist, know that those people struggle, and to put some good—hopefully—recommendations forward. A select committee is transparent, it is accountable, it is public, and it is open to everybody. It is not cumbersome; it is easy for people to participate.

I have nothing against the Minister of Health doing his work and getting his experts together and getting the voice of a few clients through that. That could go on. It

doesn't keep us from having the select committee go forward. I am positive that, at the very least, we would help to educate and change the view of many Ontarians about those rare diseases, do our work and bring forward some basically unanimous, nonpartisan ways forward.

New Democrats will be voting 100% in favour of putting together this select committee. Anything we can do to help the #TreatRareDisease campaign, we are willing to help. Those people are here today because they want us to do something and they want to be part of the solution. Let's not turn our back on them; let's bring them in. We can learn from them. We will learn from them. Rare diseases will change for the better because we will have a select committee.

1410

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

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'm pleased to stand in the House and have the opportunity to join this very important conversation, and to talk a bit, if I may, of the good work that our government is doing to improve health care services for Ontarians with a rare disease or disorder.

I'd like to recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his continued advocacy in this area, and I'd like to thank the organizations, patient groups, and those Ontarians who have a rare disease or disorder, as well as their friends and families, for their work on this issue. I know that many of them have joined us in the gallery today. Thank you for being here.

Our government is committed to putting patients first, which is why our recent budget includes increases to health care spending of \$1 billion, including \$345 million in hospitals, to ensure patients receive the right care at the right time and in the right place. Understanding the experience of those individuals who use our health care system is essential to this commitment, because when we understand their experiences, we can make the changes necessary to our system to meet their needs.

Our government knows that there are many Ontarians living with or who have family members living with rare diseases or disorders. We also know that because these conditions are rare, they can often be misdiagnosed. The effect of this is that these Ontarians face challenges in their ability to access appropriate care. We recognize the hardship and stress that this can cause and the impact it can have on people's everyday lives. We recognize, too, that we need to take action, and I want to assure Ontarians living with rare diseases or disorders, and their families, that this work is under way.

As a government, we have done much to improve access to care for these individuals, but still more needs to be done, and that needs to be acknowledged. Our goal has been and continues to be to offer the best possible care to help them. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care has been working hard with partners across Canada, leading a working group to develop a pan-Canadian rare disease strategy. As a clinician, he not only empathizes with those who suffer from rare diseases and with their families; he is committed to working with

colleagues from across our country to strategize possible solutions.

Just this week, on International Rare Disease Day on Monday, February 29, the minister announced further steps to better serve Ontarians with rare conditions.

Our government shared the report of the Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, or EDS, expert panel with the public. In response to the panel's recommendations, our government is creating a new centre of excellence clinic that will focus on diagnosing and treating adults and children living with EDS, a group of inherited disorders that affect your connective tissues, primarily your skin, joints and blood vessel walls. This new clinic would strengthen care and support for individuals and families living with EDS by offering primary care providers a single point of contact to receive information and guidelines on related signs and symptoms. It would also provide advice and feedback from clinical experts on diagnosis and treatment options, as well as make referrals to specialists, including geneticists, pediatricians and pain management professionals. The minister also announced that the clinic could be expanded to support primary care providers treating people with other rare diseases, if required.

Further to the announcement of the clinic, our government announced that we will be creating a working group comprised of Ontario experts to explore how services for people with rare diseases and disorders in Ontario can be improved. The group will look at improving early detection and prevention, providing timely and accurate diagnosis and care, and improving community supports for patients and their families. Issues such as these require advice and input from experts in the field and those with clinical experience, which is exactly the reason this working group will be made up of both.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share an excerpt regarding our government's recent announcement from the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders, or CORD: "... the Canadian Organization for Rare Disorders (CORD) welcomes the announcement made by Ontario Health Minister Eric Hoskins to open a new clinic for patients with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS), which could be expanded to other rare disorders, as well as his commitment to strike a working group to develop an Ontario approach to a coordinated provincial health care system for patients with rare disorders." Their president and CEO goes on to say, "Minister Hoskins' previous efforts on behalf of patients with urgent and underserved needs gives Ontario families with rare diseases great hope that his leadership and commitment will inspire other stakeholders and offer an example for other provinces."

I take pride in the support shown to our government, and that quote in particular, for our work in this area by organizations such as CORD. It reinforces our commitment to putting patients first and acknowledges our hard work on developing a plan of action.

In closing, I'd like to acknowledge an outstanding advocate in my constituency, Lynn Clark, who came to see me recently about the need for our government to work towards an approach on rare disorders. Lynn sits on

the board of the ILC, the Improving the Lives of Children Foundation, based in Halton region. She attended Minister Hoskins's announcement as a result of her passion for and commitment to finding solutions for patients. Her experiences with her daughter, Chelsea Clark, a gold-medal Paralympian, and a young woman whose challenges with chronic pain were largely misunderstood, drove Lynn to become the passionate advocate that she is.

I'd like to commend again the continued efforts by the member from Kitchener-Conestoga in advocating on behalf of Ontarians with rare diseases and disorders. He clearly shares our commitment to putting patients first and ensuring that their needs are met as quickly as possible by providing the best possible care.

Our work in this area will continue, because it must. I look forward to working together with the member opposite and, indeed, all members of this House. I want to underscore, in closing, that while we might not always agree on the mechanism for moving this forward, no one should take that as a sign or a commitment that our government doesn't care about this issue. In fact, we do, which is precisely why our minister looks forward, as I mentioned, to working with all members of this House to solve this very important and pernicious issue.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm happy to stand up here with full support of this motion put forward by the member from Kitchener-Conestoga, Mike Harris, who has done a tremendous amount of work, advocacy and promotion of rare diseases in our province. He should be commended tenfold, continually, because without his work on this issue, rare diseases would still be on the back plate of this government's agenda. This motion brings it forward, and we're hoping that, through this debate, they have a change of heart and will support this motion.

Everybody, in their riding, has someone that comes knocking on their door with a rare disease, because, as Mr. Harris has mentioned, there are over 7,000 diseases. I'm going to mention two in my riding. You might hear this government, later on in this debate, talk about how they want to remove the politics from the decision-making. Sometimes you need the politics to create the structure for the bureaucrats to make the decisions necessary.

My concern is, through my two people from my riding who came forward—their concerns were because the bureaucracy was too rigid in their decision-making and not flexible. I think that when you're dealing with treating rare diseases, you need to have that flexibility in place. I believe that this motion, this committee that the member from Kitchener-Conestoga wants to create, will allow that to develop.

I have one resident who has pulmonary hypertension. She's six years old, Mr. Speaker. Not very many young children get pulmonary hypertension. That's a high blood pressure between the lungs and the heart. It's very rare and very hard to treat. In fact, the medications that they're developing, and the research, are focused around

adults, because they're the majority of people who end up getting pulmonary hypertension.

For her to get treatment, the doctors have had to mess around with the doses, and they came up with three different medications that work. Unfortunately, the government will only agree to pay for two of them. For the third one, the family is left to scrounge around to get enough money in order to give their six-year-old daughter some enjoyment in life. She has to carry around this great big oxygen tank with her. She has to have a nurse at school with her. She's six years old.

We live in a province where we think we should be doing all we can for children with rare diseases. We should be giving them a life.

My other concern in my riding is this poor little girl who suffers from Diamond-Blackfan anemia, which means her one treatment is a corticosteroid and it has to be given by the IV route.

Now, this is where this drives me nuts, this bureaucracy that has formed there. This government, which I'm thankful for, helps pay for the pumps for diabetics. This poor girl's medication can be delivered by this pump. The government pays for diabetic children, but because she has Diamond-Blackfan anemia, it's not covered. It's \$5,000 for that family. That's unheard of. How many children have this disease? How much more would it cost, actually, to pay for those additional pumps for these children? But it's a rigid structure over there that doesn't allow this to occur.

1420

Mr. Speaker, this government talks a lot about wanting to work together with us. This motion allows us to work together—all three parties working together—for solutions. I'm calling on this government to change your mind. Support this motion. Get your heads out of the sand. We can work together and make a difference. This isn't political. There's no politics in this paper. Support it.

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

Mr. Michael Mantha: I wish we had a lot more time to talk about this particular issue, because many individuals are affected and feel like they're being left out of the discussion. They feel like their voices aren't being heard.

I was speaking to a wonderful, beautiful, articulate, blue-eyed young woman last night, whom I met through many years of working with her. She has been educating me on her behalf. She shared with me a story and an experience that she has gone through many times. But she did ask me to share an experience that she recently had over the course of this last weekend. With her permission, she granted me the opportunity of doing that. I think a lot of people will feel what this girl has felt through other diseases that are here in the province.

I just want to make sure that I can put this in and have enough time, so I'll start reading. I'd like to share the story of Paige Spencer and her recent experience while attending a hospital for care. She writes on her Facebook page, and you can check out a lot of her stories that are there.

"Hey everyone, so here's my health update: I apologize that it isn't going to be positive ... usually I'm a happy person who finds positivity in everything but lately I feel no control at all over my life...."

"The hospital really didn't help me at all Sunday night. They basically put me in a room and ignored me while I screamed in horrendous pain for two hours.

"One time when my mom went out she told them that I had to use the washroom but was in such horrible pain and was wondering when I was going to get my pain meds. They kept making excuses to delay giving me the meds and the one 'health care provider' just was rude to my mom. So after, like, about an hour of me waiting and holding, I told her just go get me a bedpan considering I'm getting over a bladder infection and it's now causing me more pain. They continued to delay for so long.

"After, like, 20 minutes a lady came in with attitude and told me there are no bedpans and that I need to get up and basically stop crying and grow up. Last time I checked a 'health care provider' is supposed to be kind and helpful. I couldn't believe her. Every time I started screaming due to feeling like my spine felt like it was going to snap, my mom was so upset seeing her daughter like this and the woman goes, 'Get used to it, honey. This is your new normal. You've just got to suck it up and be a big girl.' My mom said, 'It shouldn't be normal ... she's been suffering for too long....'

"Oh yeah and, of course, the 'health care provider' suggested that I get psychological help about 10 times. Of course, no wonder I'm depressed because every hospital I go to and every doctor who sees me are 'uninformed about Lyme' and say I'm crazy, a drug addict, or that I'm just stressed out or want attention! If that's the case, I deserve an Oscar if this is all an act.

"Anyways, they didn't offer me much help at all. They thought I was exaggerating my pain. I flipped at the doctor and was hysterically crying, telling him I can't take this pain anymore. I've never had spinal pain and I'd rather take a bullet. After my freak out at him, I could see he was a little bit more considerate and sympathetic to my situation. So they gave me pain meds, booked a neurologist appointment, and a prescription for pain meds.

"So yesterday was absolutely hell and so is today. I couldn't sleep at all last night because the pain is so intense. I'm on heavy pain meds and also marijuana oil and all of that is still not taking away the pain in my spine.

"Us Lymies are tough because we live with excruciating pain all the time but this spinal pain is absolutely horrendous. I'm so angry with my life, I'm not going to sugar-coat it.

"I handle my disease with strength and faith, but I have no clue what is going on with me anymore. No one is helping me or giving me answers.

"At home, every day my family feels completely helpless and terrified as they watch their 21-year-old daughter scream in agonizing pain. Not only am I suffering in pain physically, mentally and emotionally, but I'm suffering from guilt and anger as I watch my pain and my

disease destroy my loved ones. It's affecting their health so much that it kills me because I can't do anything about it.

"I'm so sorry for this rant; usually I'm very positive and happy about sharing my story and spreading the word about my disease. I don't like my disease or my pain control my life or allow it to destroy it. But it's hard when things start to finally go well in my life and then, bam, everything falls apart again so quickly. I know I will get through this, and I will beat this battle. I'm just going through a very hard time right now.

"This pain is just not giving up. I can only hope some doctor will want to help me. All I can do right now is try to get lots of rest and pray.

"I sincerely thank everyone for their love, support and prayers. You guys really do keep me going. Just when I want to give up, I remember how much support I have from all of you. I'm sorry I haven't gotten to replying to the emails or messages some of you sent to me. I'm just so exhausted. This message took over an hour to try and put it together. I thank everyone. I keep praying this fight will be over soon."

I thought I'd share a few comments her friends put on it. One of her friends said, "I hate this. I hate seeing my beautiful friend and her family suffering while nothing is done. When does this stop, Michael Mantha? When will the government undo this injustice? Let's hope it's not before we lose more warriors!"

My reply to her was, "This pains me to no end. It angers and fuels me to get the changes done now! Too many are suffering. I'm trying my best and will continue doing so until the job is done."

Paige replies, "Thank you, Michael. I pray one day this nightmare will end. I'm just getting very tired of being treated like this.

"We talk so much about mental health and how important it is, but they are making mine worse. I'm depressed because I'm in chronic pain, and the doctors make me feel like I'm crazy and that my life isn't important. I go to the hospital in an emergency and they yell at me and treat me like So I'm left to thank our medical system for making me feel suicidal. Michael, if you ever need my story, please let me know. I have no issue telling people the suffering I'm forced to endure."

I replied to her, "I do, and we will share your story!" I have, and I hope you listened.

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

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to speak to the motion from the member from Kitchener-Conestoga. I want to congratulate him on his efforts and his advocacy for people and their families suffering with rare disorders.

I'd also like to recognize the advocacy of Ontarians with rare disorders, their families, their friends, and the organizations that stand behind them for their work and their efforts. There are many of them in the Legislature with us here today. I'd like to recognize and acknowledge their presence.

Many members in this House have someone in their extended family who suffers from a rare disorder. I can guarantee you that all members in this House have probably met a constituent who suffers from a rare disorder. It's something that affects all of our communities.

In particular in my community, a lady named Unita Louis was a very strong advocate for those suffering from sickle-cell anemia. Her son, Brent, had sickle-cell anemia. I had the opportunity to work with her and help her in organizing a conference. She did a lot of work, and her son Brent passed away in July this year. He was in his thirties. She stepped back from being an advocate, but I can still remember in 2005, when sickle-cell was added to the tests for newborn screening and the kind of difference that made in people's lives in terms of early diagnosis and the ability to provide the treatments that those suffering with sickle-cell anemia needed.

1430

As we know, diagnosis is an important thing. I've heard a few times here today where people haven't been diagnosed—I think the member from Kitchener-Conestoga mentioned EDS—and that's a very serious thing, because if you don't recognize what you have, it's pretty hard to treat it.

I am very pleased to say that newborn screening is housed at CHEO, in my riding of Ottawa South. Right now, I think there are 29 disorders and illnesses that they test for, and I know they are moving along in terms of trying to expand that even further. I think that's going to go a long way. By the way, we screen for the most disorders in all of Canada and we're trying to lead a pan-Canadian approach to newborn screening so that it's effective across Canada. I want to recognize that, as well as the work that the ministry is doing on the effort to pull together work on rare diseases at the pan-Canadian level.

Now, I know that people are saying the debate is not politicized, but it gets a little politicized when the actions of the government are characterized as no action. As I've said before in this Legislature, all of us have sat on this side—all of our parties. We all have had to make decisions, and we all share one common value. I think that to impugn motive on people is not the right thing to do in this Legislature, and I just want to point that out.

I think that when it comes, for instance, to therapies and new drugs, I as a legislator don't feel that I'm equipped to make those decisions. I know that I'm emotionally equipped to make those decisions, but I don't know if I can make those decisions in the best interests of the public.

I just want to bring people back to multiple sclerosis—MS—and liberation therapy. We can all remember the hope and the desire that was created at that time in patients who were suffering, and that hope was not well founded. But there was a lot of pressure, and we have to recognize that those things happen in the system.

I do want to finish by saying that I applaud the recent announcement by the minister on EDS, the report of the expert panel and the new centre here at UHN. I applaud the working group. This is being used as a model for how we treat rare diseases and how we look at the issues

around making sure that primary care is aware, making sure that—there's a lot of need for information out there.

I do want to say that I believe the actions we are taking as a government will go a long way—a very long way—to improve conditions for those suffering with rare disorders. I'm not saying it's an easy road, and I'm not saying that everything is going to get solved. What I am saying is that I believe this is the right approach, and as my father used to say, the best way to get started is just to get started.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm honoured to rise and join in the debate. I want to begin by congratulating the member for Kitchener–Conestoga. He's a real true champion of this issue, and he has taken a lot of time travelling across our province to give a voice to those people who are suffering with rare diseases—people who, in many cases, wonder if the government is listening. I want to thank him. He came to my riding of Leeds–Grenville, and we hosted a meeting in Brockville. We had a great turnout and an excellent discussion about the incredible obstacles that people with rare diseases face every day.

It's heartbreaking to hear the stories, and I have many stories I could tell today. But I want to mention a few people, like Charlie Smith and his sister, Jessica Smith-Covey, who suffer from Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. They're sick and they need treatment. But some spend years looking for a doctor who won't tell them it's all in their head. Then if they're lucky enough to do that, they must fight the provincial health care system for support. As we know, far too often, that uphill battle ends with patients and their families being forced to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars or more, to travel outside of Ontario for their treatment.

All their time should be spent fighting the disease; they shouldn't have to fight the system. With the minister's announcement this week regarding an Ehlers-Danlos clinic, I think the member can take some satisfaction that his motion today is already resulting in some improvements in our system. I think you can take some congratulations for that.

But I think we all agree on this side of the House that we need to do more and that a select committee would be an excellent opportunity to provide a non-partisan forum to do that. It could allow us to hear from experts and from patients, so we can design a system that does a better job of treating rare diseases.

We're blessed in this province to have many resources. Those resources should be going to help people like little Kaiden Sturgeon. He's an eight-month-old kid whose mother, Kristen, lives in my riding. Kristen and Kaiden wanted to be here. He suffers from Sandhoff disease, an incredibly rare genetic disorder. But the trip here would just be too much for them, as with so many people who I think would have loved to be here today to be able to tell their story.

I was with Kristen's family on Saturday at an event they held to raise money so Kaiden can travel to Minnesota for treatment. I still have the bracelet that

Kaiden gave me on Saturday. With everything this family is going through, trying to look after their sick little boy, organizing fundraisers is the very last thing they should be doing, but that's the reality. That's the reality for so many families that are here today. That's what the government has made them do: They've made them fund-raise for their health care.

So we owe it to Kaiden and to Jessica and to Charlie, whose lives have been shattered by a rare disease diagnosis, to make Ontario a leader in getting the treatment they desperately need. Speaker, there's one way we can do it. Michael Harris articulated it today: It's this motion. We should stop the partisan bickering and get it done.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'd ask the member to use ridings.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm going to speak in favour. I'm going to allow my colleague to speak on the issue. I'd like to ask you to please support these families, and the families that can't be here today.

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

Mr. Bill Walker: I believe it is our duty to stand with the people who suffer from one of the 7,000 rare diseases and who are calling on us to help them. The stories I heard from two patients in my riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound are truly harrowing. They are a nine-month-old little girl, Darcey Papineau, and six-year-old Michael McManaman.

Dan and Dionne Papineau wrote me after their nine-month-old daughter, Darcey, was admitted to SickKids for the second time, back in November. Darcey was diagnosed with aHUS, atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome, a rare blood disorder. Up until that day, the family had never even heard of this disease. They said that Darcey initially responded well to a dialysis type of treatment, where doctors removed her plasma and replaced it with new. But when her blood counts didn't stay stable and dropped, Darcey was readmitted.

When the parents contacted me, Darcey was going into day 3 of plasma transfusions. The doctors advised them that Darcey will, at some point, likely require a drug called eculizumab, which is not covered by OHIP and costs approximately \$500,000 per year. I don't know who in Ontario could afford such astronomical drug costs, but the Papineaus certainly cannot.

I quote from Darcey's mom. "It is heartbreaking," her mom said to me, "to think that at some point money (or rather, a lack of) will dictate our daughter's quality of life ... To think that as parents, we would be unable to afford to give her that feeling all of the time is simply heartbreaking. We are asking that you lend your support to MPP Harris's bill."

Amanda McManaman's story is very similar. Again, it is a story of struggling, coping and living a parent's worst nightmare. Her son Michael was born with phenylketonuria, PKU, an inherited metabolic disorder found in approximately one in 12,000 infants born in Canada. If left untreated, symptoms of PKU can range from mild cognitive impairment to severe intellectual disability and epilepsy. It is critical to the child's brain development

that the appropriate treatment is initiated immediately and maintained throughout life.

Ontario listed KUVAN in February 2013, but the highly restrictive criteria are preventing patients who respond to KUVAN from qualifying for publicly funded access to this brain-protecting treatment, including her son Michael. Amanda wrote multiple letters to the Minister of Health to ask why patients are not getting access to life-saving KUVAN, the first and only pharmaceutical treatment for PKU.

1440

She wrote:

“While your government says they cover the cost of KUVAN for those with PKU, the reality is it doesn’t, because no patient has been able to access it to date.... For those living with PKU who are responders to this drug, the evidence thus far shows that it improves one’s quality of life by preventing further cognitive, psychiatric problems, and further permanent disabilities, which would alleviate pressures on the health care system.... It really takes a village to raise a child, but sometimes it takes more. And in my case, because Michael was born with this rare, genetic, life-long condition, it’s going to take help from you, our provincial government, to ensure that he has what he needs most for the rest of his life—this medication.... That is why I am asking you to start protecting the brains of children and adults living with PKU, by following the guidance of medical experts, in Ontario and worldwide, and immediately rewrite the KUVAN criteria to make the drug accessible to all patients who respond to it.”

Darcey and Michael are two faces of the rare diseases Ontarians are fighting. They need and they deserve to have the very best treatment options moving forward. I urge the members opposite to vote with us, to vote with Michael Harris and all the people of Ontario.

I want to acknowledge Michael—and he’s way too humble. He’s doing it for the right reasons. He’s doing it for those thousands of people out there who are doing it. He has raised, through compassion, the awareness of this debilitating situation for many, many families—and as well, to his staff who have done the research and travelled with him across this province.

I believe John Adams is in the gallery, and I would like to acknowledge him as well. He met with me last week. He’s a sufferer and he came to me, again, from personal convictions, to try to get us to listen, to try to make our provincial government listen and make sure we have the ability.

This all-party select committee is the ability. As the member across the floor said, the best way to start is to just start. Today, every single member of this Legislature can put their hand up with a positive. They can vote for this select committee and they can truly make that step, make a difference in the lives of everyone suffering with a rare disorder.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga. You have two minutes for a response.

Mr. Michael Harris: I thank all of those rare disease sufferers who are here with us today, who travelled from across the province, from all corners, to come and hear today’s debate. I want to really give them a shout-out and thank them for that.

Of course, I’d like to thank my own caucus colleagues for those kind words and the stops along the way, and those in the NDP caucus for their support in moving this campaign forward. My colleague mentioned my staff. Rob, Jacqueline, Sydney, Sadie and Norma all did tremendous work on this file, and I’d like to thank them for sure on that.

As well, to the government caucus who previously indicated their support, I look forward to thanking you, should that support in fact come through.

Speaker, as I’ve been listening to today’s debate, I have been struck by the possibility that the government will choose to turn their backs to those in the gallery and those across the province watching on. I’ve listened to the government members and listened to the minister’s unfortunate answers to my questions earlier today and, honestly, I have a hard time believing what I’ve heard. I find it hard to believe the minister could hide behind yet another closed-door working group to reject our proposal for a transparent, all-party, public select committee to tour the province, hear from experts, the sufferers, and use the first-hand experience to develop meaningful, lasting recommendations for rare disease treatment in Ontario.

Just outside these doors, the minister tried to suggest today that the working group would take the politicians out of the process, but he knows as well as I the recent successful history of the all-party select committees. Too many times, we’ve seen announcements of government intentions to address these issues, as we heard earlier this week, and too many times we’ve seen the announcements used an excuse for inaction. There’s absolutely no reason why we cannot support the minister’s working group and the select committee. When it comes to rare diseases, it’s the patients who are the experts, and it’s those experts we need to hear from.

Today, we have the opportunity to rise together to meet the challenges faced by those who have suffered in isolation for far too long. Think about the stories we’ve heard today. Think about the patients and do the right thing in supporting them and supporting my motion.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We’ll take the vote on this item at the end of regular business.

LICENSED HOME INSPECTORS ACT,
2016

LOI DE 2016
SUR LES INSPECTEURS D’HABITATIONS
TITULAIRES D’UN PERMIS

Mr. Dong moved second reading of the following bill:
Bill 165, An Act to regulate home inspectors / Projet de loi 165, Loi visant à réglementer les inspecteurs d’habitations.

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

Mr. Han Dong: I'm privileged to rise today to speak to my private member's bill, titled Licensed Home Inspectors Act. I want to begin by welcoming the stakeholders who are in the gallery and who have remained committed to building a healthy home inspection industry: Len Inkster and Patrick Auriol from the Ontario Association of Certified Home Inspectors, Murray Parish and David Hellyer from the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors, Graham Clarke and T.J. Smith, as well as William Stratas from Eagle Audit. I want to recognize the hard work they've done in support of all home inspectors, and I want to make sure that work does not go unnoticed.

My EA, Shawn Ogborne, my former OLIP intern Sara O'Sullivan and I brought this bill forward to enhance consumer protection for homeowners and to unify the industry.

The purchase of a home is one of the largest investments homeowners will make in their lifetime. That investment should be protected. Many homebuyers, especially first-time buyers, rely on the expert opinion of a home inspector with regard to the condition of a potential home. However, if you ask homebuyers whether or not they know home inspection is a nonregulated industry, I believe many would be shocked to hear that is no regulated body to license or regulate.

There is no way for consumers to confidently know their home inspector is meeting the high and consistent standards we expect in Ontario. I have heard over and over from constituents about challenges they have faced with their home purchases that could have been flagged by a qualified home inspector. Now, there are several hard-working home inspector associations that are dedicated to the professionalism of the industry. These associations, some of whom are in the gallery today, have given the industry a strong foundation to build on. However, these associations have varied governing systems and requirements that could be confusing to average consumers.

Industry stakeholders whom I've consulted with have expressed strong support for regulating the industry to make sure it's sustainable and trusted by Ontarians. This bill, if passed, will create one licensing regime operating under an independent board that reflects different aspects of the home inspection industry. The delegated administrative authority, or DAA, will carry out licensing and other regulatory responsibilities at arm's length to the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

Regulation by an industry-funded DAA is a way to ensure a more level playing field for home inspectors to operate with similar qualifications. By enforcing a single standard, the DAA would provide greater transparency and consumer protection in the ever-changing market.

This bill also proposes accountability measures such as minimum mandatory insurance, a code of ethics and other requirements which will be determined in the

regulation process. Licensed by the proposed DAA, qualified home inspectors will earn the legal title of "licensed home inspector," which symbolizes professionalism and industry standard. In short, the creation of a home inspection DAA would provide consistent, reliable service by licensed home inspectors at an affordable price.

During the consultation process, some asked me, Why a DAA model? Five years ago, Mr. Don Drummond, a prominent economist, published a report that later became known as the Drummond report. In it, Drummond referenced the delegated administrative authority review. This review found that the DAA model worked effectively and efficiently as a regulatory body for consumer protection. The benefits of a DAA were found to be reducing cost to government and reducing size of government as service delivery is transferred to an external, not-for-profit service provider, improving regulatory outcomes and improving efficiency. Government oversight is retained, and there is increased industry engagement through participation on the board.

1450

The Drummond report and the DAA review have confirmed that a DAA is the best body to regulate home inspectors. But most importantly, a DAA model was the recommendation of the 2013 panel and was seen as the most beneficial to the majority of those we've consulted.

As mentioned earlier, I have heard issues from many of my constituents in Trinity-Spadina. In one incident, an individual made a large investment in a condo purchase downtown. After electing not to have an inspection done, this individual found a problem that is now causing the family extreme irritation and discomfort in their home. In hindsight, this issue could have been easily flagged by a qualified inspector.

In addition to speaking to constituents, I spent a long period of time speaking to a variety of stakeholders in the home inspection industry about issues such as getting complaints from consumers about an individual calling himself a home inspector; searching for the individual in the association records only to find out that they don't belong to their association; and needing to refer the consumer to make a complaint elsewhere because the person is not part of their association.

The DAA would make navigation easier for consumers: Either they are licensed and can be found through the DAA, or they're not licensed and are breaking the law. They told me that home inspectors do more than just inspect the house: They act as consultants to homebuyers by also educating them on how to take care of their beloved homes.

Another interesting use of a home inspection would take place before a major renovation. Based on his or her knowledge and expertise, a licensed inspector would spot potential issues, helping the owner to minimize or avoid financial loss.

Many stakeholders mentioned that in the hot real estate market, individuals are waiving the option of having a home inspection. I view this as a great loss, es-

pecially to first-time homeowners, who, without a home inspection, are taking a risk on their investment and on their family's health and safety. If passed, the home inspection DAA will build up the profile of the home inspection industry and inject consumer confidence into this invaluable service, encouraging more consumers to utilize home inspectors.

In 2013, the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services brought together an expert panel to look at qualified home inspectors. The panel included home inspectors, consumer advocates, educators and other professionals in sectors such as real estate, law and insurance. The panel prepared a comprehensive report that recommends the regulation of home inspectors. I want to thank the minister, who's not here right now—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, no, you can't do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would remind the member that we're not supposed to make reference—

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Speaker.

I want to thank the Minister of Government and Consumer Services for bringing the panel together this past summer, reaffirming the report and continuing to take a leadership role in consumer protection.

Home inspectors provide an important service to Ontarians as they have the ability to assess a home the way an average consumer cannot. The longevity of the industry very much depends on the trust of Ontarians. Unfortunately, just one unqualified home inspector could breach that trust. A home inspection DAA would allow consumers to know with certainty that the home inspector they're hiring is qualified and competent.

Given the record-breaking real estate transactions taking place in Ontario, more than ever we need a reliable, affordable home inspection industry. This bill is about protecting consumers, ensuring sustainability of an industry and upholding the principles of transparency and accountability.

In closing, I respectfully ask the members of this House for your support for better protection for homeowners and a stronger home inspection industry.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 165, An Act to regulate home inspectors.

This government is indeed sending out mixed messages. First, in the spring of 2012, the Minister of Consumer Services, Ms. Best, states that the number of complaints does not warrant regulation. A year later, the then Minister of Consumer Services strikes an expert panel on home inspection regulation, which reports back in 2013, recommending the regulation of home inspectors. Then we see no action by this government until one of their members, the member from Trinity-Spadina, who obviously is as fed up with this Liberal government's inaction as the people of Ontario and the official opposition, tables his own private member's bill.

While I commend the member on finally taking action and not waiting for a government bill, I am concerned

that this bill is issued without taking into consideration the results of the expert panel. It is just a renamed copy of the Condominium Management Services Act. The people of Ontario and the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors deserve more.

First of all, if the government is indeed writing legislation, as their action might suggest, we ask them to move on it, because the people of Ontario and the home inspectors need protection. Secondly, we need some important amendments to this legislation.

While we acknowledge that it is important legislation, we are very concerned that this bill creates an agency with so much power and so little oversight and accountability. The new authority is under no oversight by the Ombudsman or any other officers of the Legislature, except the Auditor General, who will be unable to review any of the individual cases that arise. When we talk about one's home and the purchase or sale of it, the issues can be catastrophic to Ontario families.

This bill specifically places the authority outside the review of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Since the government is writing its own bill, we would ask for the same amendments to it as to this bill: oversight by the Standing Committee on Government Agencies and all the Legislature's independent officers; application of the sunshine list; and ministerial power to review and modify the authority's regulations and bylaws as required.

In addition, the minister took the time to consult with the industry. Let's ensure that those recommendations are considered in the legislation that is passed in this Legislature.

Speaker, the purchase of a home is probably the largest investment the average Ontario family makes, and they expect more from this government.

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

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As always, it's an honour to be called upon in Ontario's provincial Parliament and to speak on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Windsor-Tecumseh.

Bill 165 is An Act to regulate home inspectors. I think it's a sound act. In fact, I had been working on an identical bill; I started last fall. My friend the member for Trinity-Spadina beat me to the punch—I was kidding him about that when he introduced Bill 165. As I've said in the House before, a good idea is a good idea no matter where it comes from.

Back on November 3, Helmut Stautt was sitting in the gallery over here. He was a visitor in the members' gallery because his grandson Cameron Rodzik was the page captain that day. I was spending some time with the Rodzik family and the Stautts explaining procedure, and Helmut said, "Can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Why don't we regulate home inspectors in Ontario?" I said, "I don't know. I'll look into it."

So we started making some calls—started calling around. I had my legislative assistant, Angie Dawson, contact some people in the library and so on. I did so

because I had heard before from family members and friends who were buying homes and weren't really satisfied with the advice or the report they got from their home inspector, because things happened at the end of it. It ended up costing them a lot more money.

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I was always under the impression, as I'm sure a lot of us were in this province, that home inspectors had to be trained, educated, certified, and had to be experienced.

Mr. Mike Colle: Anybody can be a home inspector. Percy Hatfield: home inspector.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: There you go.

After speaking with Helmut and checking it out, I found out that wasn't the case. As you know, Speaker, there's a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes when you're starting to put together a private member's bill. I mean, we even reached out to Mike Holmes, the TV guy; he's going to correct all the deficiencies, right?

Anyway, I'll be supporting the bill, as will members of the NDP caucus. That's not to say that the bill can't be improved.

The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has said in the past, as the member from Eglinton-Lawrence just said, that anyone with a business card and a flashlight can call themselves a home inspector in this province.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: No, I said it, then he said it.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Was that you, Minister?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: That was me.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: That was you? I'm sorry.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I started all this, actually.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Oh, well, okay.

What's needed, Speaker, is a strict and regulated training and education component in the bill. As I understand it, across Canada there are, like, 3,000 people earning an income as home inspectors but no single set of standards for obtaining the professional designation as a home inspector.

Believe it or not, Speaker, I know that if you're inclined—and I hope you're not—but should you choose to do so, you can go online today, fill in some forms and pay a fee, of course, and get a certificate suitable for framing mailed to you within a matter of days. You don't even have to buy a flashlight or a ladder, and you'll be a home inspector.

Mr. Mike Colle: Instant home inspectors. That's a good job for you, Speaker.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yes, it works, right?

We should be aiming higher, Speaker. We should be having the highest standards. I know we should make it mandatory for home inspectors to have to take and pass a formal course at a community college. If plumbers and electricians have to spend up to 9,000 hours learning their trade, shouldn't the men and women who are going to go in and inspect their work, who tell me, "Yes, the home is worth buying; it's not going to burn down and the toilets are going to flush," know what they're looking at? They should have some on-the-job training, as well as classroom training, to know what they're doing.

I would hope that whoever earns a living as a driving instructor actually has a driver's licence, and I hope my doctor has graduated from medical school, so I would hope a home inspector actually has some experience in the field.

The bill should protect consumers. We know the government is taking us down a path towards energy efficient audits before a home can be sold, so why not enhance the home inspector certification program so that these folks will actually be trained as energy auditors, as well? And the bill should insist that a registry of qualified inspectors be available in every region of the province.

Speaker, as you know, the ministry of consumer services started this, and I think the minister was the minister back in 2013 when you started this—

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you; yes, I was.

Mr. Mike Colle: It's a slow process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Eglinton-Lawrence, would you come to order?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My first choice would like to see this as a government bill. Make no mistake about it, it should be a government bill. For whatever reason, the government has decided not to bring it in as a government bill but to encourage the member for Trinity-Spadina—and thank you for doing this—to proceed with a private member's bill.

I hope that the government will see to it that this bill is sent to committee, listen to the witnesses and pass it to bring it back here, and that we get on with it. We shouldn't allow it to languish. The government should make this bill happen. We should have trained inspectors adhering to an established code of ethics, and I hope they have all kinds of insurance as a prerequisite, in case they mess it up and you and I are left out in the cold.

I hope the government isn't making a mistake by not making it a government bill. I hope we'll get it passed. I want to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina for bringing this forward, because the government chose not to, and I want to thank my constituent Helmet Stautt for bringing it to my attention last fall.

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

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I will be sharing my time today with the members from Beaches-East York, Newmarket-Aurora and Eglinton-Lawrence.

I couldn't agree more with what has been said, that purchasing a home is the single biggest investment that people will make in their lifetimes. It is so important that buyers are aware of the condition of their new home, both from a financial investment and safety perspective.

In my previous life, working in residential and commercial renovation, interior design and rental property ownership, I saw first-hand the importance of a thorough and proper home inspection. Home inspectors have the skills and knowledge to inspect a home in a lot more detail than the average buyer, and even the foresight to anticipate problems in the future. Unfortunately, they are not all created equal.

I have benefited greatly from home inspectors' services, both personally in the purchase of my own home and as part of my professional work. My brother, on the other hand, experienced some life-changing difficulties. He purchased a home that had mould in the basement. It was not discovered during the home inspection, and he lived in that home for several years before he realized that he was inflicting permanent damage to his lungs. Since that time, he has endured years of difficulty breathing, numerous lengthy hospital stays, and massive doses of prednisone, which have depleted his bone mass to a fraction of what it once was, to the point where he can break ribs from coughing. His lungs function at 30% of their normal capacity. Surely, there is nothing worse than watching a loved one struggle for every breath.

While the majority of home inspectors adopt high standards and are registered with one or more home inspector associations, currently anyone—as has already been said—can become a home inspector in Ontario. There are also nine different home inspection associations or certification bodies operating in Ontario, with varying levels of qualifications and requirements.

If a homebuyer is not diligent in requesting the qualifications and registration of the home inspector they have contracted, they can become inadvertent victims. This should not be about luck; this is about consumer protection. Homebuyers should feel secure that when they contract a home inspector, they can expect minimum and uniform qualifications, standards of practice and provision of services. Bill 165 would create those requirements and standards.

I'm also very supportive of the accountability measures proposed in Bill 165, which would include mandatory minimum insurance, a code of ethics and a consumer complaint process. The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services is actively working on addressing this issue and has committed to moving forward with the development of a legislative framework to regulate home inspectors.

Requiring that home inspectors be licensed would ensure consumer protection and a fair marketplace. I want to thank the member for Trinity-Spadina for his work on this important issue and for bringing this bill forward. I'm happy to lend my support and I encourage all members in the House to do the same.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to add my voice to the discussion.

First, under no circumstances am I in favour of an unregulated home inspection industry. In my view, when the barriers to entry are too low, it is very difficult for the consumer to feel safe from less-than-desirable practices; and, in fairness, it also makes it awkward for the reputable home inspection operators out there to distinguish themselves from those less reputable.

Like others before it, this industry has expected regulation for some time, but these business people also have concerns surrounding the appointment of the interim

board of directors, whether there will be a transitional period and whether or not registered, professional and law-abiding home inspectors will be grandfathered under the proposed legislation.

The other key concern with this proposed legislation is that it yet again seems to delegate authority from above. There appears to have been little or no interaction with the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors, the very people who will be directly impacted by the passage of this legislation. Frankly, this fact alone is troubling.

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Then, Mr. Speaker, there is the lack of oversight by anyone other than the Auditor General of Ontario. For any home inspection licensing authority, it is our party's recommendation that the Legislature have oversight, that the sunshine list apply and that there be ministerial powers to squash the authority's regulations and bylaws. Let's get some true oversight and accountability in the proposed legislation being considered.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to put on the record my thoughts in regard to such legislation.

I think at one time or another most of us, in our constituency offices, have had somebody who has come through the door and said, "I bought a house" or "I bought a condo," and the following thing has happened: There's no mechanism for them to be made whole for the loss that they incurred due to the condition of the unit that they've bought that was actually substandard but passed by a home inspector. I'm sure we've seen that in all of our constituencies.

I recall some of the ones that I've had to deal with. One particular individual and his wife, like everybody else, worked hard and put the money away in order to get a down payment to buy their first house. They go out and buy the house. The thing is inspected and they buy it. The mortgage is done. They take possession of the house. And then they start to find out that there are problems with the foundation. As a result of the problem with the foundation, there needed to be repairs done to the house which ended up costing a fair amount of money.

When they went back—this was within a couple of years of having bought the house but it was over the one year that you have some coverage—they ended up having to spend tens of thousands of dollars to fix the problem. Lo and behold, there's nobody who's liable for what should have been caught if there had been a proper home inspection. It turned out, in this case, that the person who did the home inspection didn't know what they were doing and they allowed something to be unseen in the inspection that wasn't reported to the buyers. As a result, they were out literally tens of thousands of dollars.

I have another one—not in my constituency, but a cousin of mine in Sudbury. He buys a house for hundreds of thousands of dollars, lives there for a couple of years, and what had happened, he finds out, is that house was built in two stages. It all looks like one if you look at it

now because construction means allow you to do that. The foundation on the second part of the house—guess what?—is not holding up too well. As a result, the house started to subside on the one side and it's thrown the attached decks out, it's cracked the walls and it's cracked the ceilings. So he's gone through this entire process of trying to recapture the money necessary in order to do the repairs, which are in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

I was there last week and I got to see it because they are working on it as we speak. You hear them doing the work that they've got to do on changing the footing and the foundation. Oh, my God, you should see what they're doing there. But here, lo and behold, they have a house that they've now got to put an extra couple of hundred thousand dollars into. What is that going to do to their position of equity on that house? Again, why? Because when the house was purchased, it had been inspected, and the inspector missed whatever had to be caught so that they could then make a decision on how to negotiate the price of the house on sale.

But the other issue is that if we do this right—I would hope this is something that we include in the legislation, should this become law—the home inspector has to be carrying some kind of insurance in order to make sure that the buyer is protected in the event that the inspection misses something, so that there's a liability issue that is dealt with. Now, there's obviously all of the other stuff that goes with this: making sure home inspectors are actually home inspectors and are certified and they know what they're doing. But there should also be some sort of liability insurance, in the same way that most of us have liability insurance.

I'm an electrician by trade. I worked in construction and maintenance in the mining sector, but if I was in the construction sector, I would have to have liability insurance on the work that I do because—who knows?—there may be a fire; there may be something that's happened with the workmanship or the people who work for me or myself. If it causes harm to the building or it causes some sort of damage, then you have to be able to cover those losses, and you have to carry liability insurance.

There should be the same kind of thing, I would hope, for home inspectors. I think this is something that has been brought to the House before, and I congratulate all of those who have raised this issue a number of times. Who knows? Maybe this is like strike one, strike two and, boy, you hit the ball out of the park—you never know.

We've got to hope that this bill actually gets to go forward and deals with making sure that consumers are properly protected when it comes to making what is, in most cases, the biggest purchase in a person's life or a couple's life: buying that home. You're going to need to make sure that you're able to provide them with adequate protection when it comes to that investment they make in their family home.

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

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm delighted to be able to stand and speak to this bill and support the member for Trinity–Spadina on this very important piece of legislation. As virtually everyone has said as they've gotten up to speak, buying a home, for the vast majority of Ontarians, is the single biggest purchase you're going to make in your lifetime, and it is so important to protect that purchase.

Many years ago, in a different life, I was the executive director of the Consumers' Association of Canada here in Ontario. We had about 60,000 members in those days, and it always amazed me that people would spend days and days, and months and months, researching what car they were going to buy, but they would see a house and buy it, and bind themselves to a contract—a mortgage—that would last seemingly hundreds of years into the future. Those were the days when home inspectors started to really come on the scene. The markets were very hot, and it was so important to have someone to give you that second sober advice as to whether or not you should purchase a house. But we began to receive complaints that some of the people weren't properly trained. Some were great. In fact, the vast majority of home inspection people that I've dealt with over the years, including the gentleman that I've used when I've purchased homes, are absolutely fantastic and worth every penny I've put into them, quite frankly. I continue to go back to the chap that I used as we do renovations over the years.

But there are so many people who don't understand the value of a home inspection, and if they do, they're at a loss. They have no idea who they should hire. Just last week, I was talking to an individual who hired a home inspector who told them that the prospective house they were about to purchase was filled with mould in the attic. They hired another inspector who came and said, no, in fact, that's not mould. And when they looked a little further, the first individual ran a company that did mould remediation. So I suspect that somewhere down the road, they were going to come back and want to clean that mould up.

I know this type of licensing will go a long way to fixing that type of mischief. As I said earlier, the vast number of home inspectors I've worked with and heard about do a really good job, but I think the industry as a whole has matured. It needs to be standardized. If you hire a home inspector in the Soo, they should have the same skill set as a home inspector in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora or one in the riding of Trinity–Spadina. So I look forward to that.

I want to perhaps correct a bit of information that the member for Whitby–Oshawa put forward. There was an awful lot of consultation, extensive consultation, done by the government with all sorts of groups in pulling this forward. In fact, there are representatives from a number of those organizations in the visitors' gallery, and judging by the smiles on their faces, I suspect they are in favour of what the member from Trinity–Spadina is moving ahead with today. There was extensive consultation with

consumer groups, extensive consultation with real estate agents and lawyers—the whole gamut of people who work with home sales, and they'll tell you, I know, that this is really good legislation. This is excellent consumer protection legislation.

1520

Again, I commend the member for Trinity–Spadina for moving it forward, and I look forward to everyone supporting it.

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

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to rise today and voice some concerns about this issue and Bill 165.

I would say that for the vast majority of my constituents in York–Simcoe, their home is probably the largest investment they will make in their lifetime. A home inspector can help prospective owners evaluate the true value of a home and identify any potential issues: everything from the exterior shell to the internal systems of heating, plumbing and wiring.

Home inspection is currently regulated under a voluntary registration framework, administered by the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors. Unfortunately, it is my understanding that they were not consulted in the drafting of this proposed legislation.

But I think it's also an opportunity to have a discussion on the fundamental importance of having that third-party validation. What comes to mind whenever we're talking about the kind of investment that a home is that we must not forget caveat emptor—buyer beware—and the fact that you have to be proactive in looking at that big investment you're about to make.

I have to tell a personal story: Years ago, when my husband and I were looking for a place, we saw one that, on the surface, we thought was absolutely perfect, and we were so excited that this particular piece of property was on the market. My mother said to me, "You know, dear, that's an older house, and it's got a complex property around it. You maybe should consult with somebody to find out what should happen. When you consider the cost of the house versus the cost of asking a home inspector to come and have a look at it, it would perhaps be a good investment." Well, it was such a good investment that we didn't buy the house. I often think of that as a demonstration of how important it is to have somebody with that kind of expertise.

The other example I have is as an MPP, where a group of residents came to see me about some egregious things that were happening. They were happening in line with about 14 houses, where the garage and the house were sort of coming apart; they were separating. Of course, it meant pools of water collecting, it meant leakage into the basement—some serious concerns that they had. I tell this story because of the fact that it eventually drew in the local building inspector and other experts and so forth. This is a cautionary tale to tell about this particular example: that people need to understand that they have to drive this process, and that we can't have building

inspectors and home inspections and the two don't meet, or there's too much red tape or it's too narrowly defined what is actually the purview of a town employee—the building inspector—and the home inspection person.

I think this is well-intentioned, but we need to have further debate.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd just like to add my voice to this debate. I fully support this bill because buying a home is one of the biggest risks you take in your life, and to mitigate risk you should be able to surround yourself with people who can help you. A home inspector is one of those people; and most people naturally think that a home inspector is someone who is fully qualified, fully regulated. We hear a lot about how people don't like red tape, but one place you want red tape is that you want a qualified home inspector. So I fully support this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to speak towards it.

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

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to be able to rise in support of the member from Trinity–Spadina's bill. I appreciate very much his articulation of the reasons why this bill is necessary, and I'm delighted to hear the support that we're getting from the other side of the House, who also recognize how important this is.

I think I mentioned the other day that I've just moved into my new house in the Beach. I'm no longer represented by the member from Toronto–Danforth; I've moved into the Beach. I didn't have the opportunity to use a home inspector when I bought this property because the market was so hot. They put it on the market on a Friday. We saw it on Friday, saw it again on Saturday morning and bought it Saturday afternoon in what's known as a bully bid, because they weren't going to take offers until Tuesday. If I had to wait around to get a building inspector to take a look at it and reassure myself that it was worth the money, I would never have got it. So we just jumped right in.

But my secret was that my real estate agent used to be a builder. My real estate agent, Roger Kilgour, is also known as Guy. Guy took me through the house—the little nooks and crannies—and did a check from a builder's perspective. Guy is really knowledgeable about this, and using Guy's advice, I go forward and we buy the house. In fact, we paid a little bit more than the asking price. I needn't go into the details; it seems unnecessary.

The very first house I bought, I bought with the assistance of a very qualified home inspector. He was my uncle, Howard Rober—my middle name comes from him—my mother's brother. His wife, Auntie Mary Lou, is the most incredible apple pie cook imaginable.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Arthur, where do you live?

Mr. Arthur Potts: In the Beach.

So when I bought this new house, I'm anticipating, now that we're into the new house—she always brings by

some apple pie. I'm hoping she will read this Hansard in due course and remember that's one of her obligations.

But my uncle was a trained house inspector and went on to become a real estate agent, and the same kind of relationship: Because he understood the bones of a house, he was able to go in with a buyer and bring that added expertise.

The member from York–Simcoe did raise the Latin “caveat emptor.” I was hoping I'd be the first one to spring a little Latin on the House, and I'm delighted that she got in there first. “Buyer beware” is what it means, short and simple. But it also means that the buyer alone is responsible for checking the quality and suitability of the goods before a purchase is made. That's what a home inspector does for you, because you can't be an expert in all things.

So the buyer, exercising caveat emptor, goes and retains the professional services of someone in order to satisfy himself that that's in fact the right thing to do. And I agree with the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane that there have to be penalties and insurances attached for errors and omissions. That's an incredibly important part of this bill, and I think that the member from Trinity–Spadina has it absolutely right in the way he has framed the bill.

I'm also delighted that this is going to a delegated administrative authority that is not going to cost the taxpayer of Ontario a cent, except for maybe the early minor cost of the set-up, but it'll be paid for and administered on the basis of the fees they collect from the home inspectors, who could easily absorb this as part of the work they do.

I would also like to say that I agree with the member for Whitby–Oshawa that there has to be greater oversight of delegated administrative authorities. I would be quite open—I hope the member will be—maybe to having that they are part of the sunshine list, because I think that the public, as part of its protection, should know how much we're paying senior administrators in all of our delegated authorities, including the Electrical Safety Authority, because that is where money hits the road: What are we paying those executives to protect the public? Thank you very much, Speaker. Good bill.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I, too, am pleased to stand today and lend my voice to the debate on Bill 165, An Act to regulate home inspectors. For Ontarians, as has been alluded to, purchasing a home is an investment in their future and their family, and probably the greatest spend they'll ever make. It affects everything, in terms of quality of life to the taxes they pay to where their children will go to school. As part of this process, home-buyers will often look to home inspectors to help them assess the true value of a property or determine if there are any issues that need to be addressed, all to ensure that they're getting the most bang for their buck.

I'm pleased it to be able to say, on behalf of the PC Party of Ontario, that we're looking to support this

particular bill, but we want to see specific amendments as well.

1530

In my brief time I want to touch on two things: first, a disturbing trend that we're seeing from this government over and over again, and that is the continued lack of consultation that this Liberal government is providing to our stakeholders from every industry. The other disturbing trend is the creation of yet another unaccountable authority.

A week ago in this very House, when debating Bill 151, I spoke about the worry I heard from stakeholders of this new authority that's being created through that particular bill enactment. Here we are again, creating yet another authority that, more times than not, this government totally forgets to provide parameters for in terms of performance measures and accountability. We have to ensure that we get better. In doing so, we're going to have some very explicit amendments based on input that we've received from stakeholders.

I just have a few seconds left, actually; time flies by. One thing that I'm very interested in: My friend Ken from Hesson, Ontario, in the riding of Perth–Wellington, went to school, did his homework and made the investment in getting proper training to be a home inspector. We need to ensure that we carry through that credibility and that consistency of offering to make sure that when somebody gets a home inspector, they all are working towards the same standard. We're going to be looking into the amendments with that specific regard.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Trinity–Spadina. You have two minutes for a reply.

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you very much, Speaker. I would like to thank the members who have spoken to my bill, including the members from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, Windsor–Tecumseh, Kingston and the Islands, Whitby–Oshawa, Timmins–James Bay, Newmarket–Aurora, York–Simcoe, Timiskaming–Cochrane, Beaches–East York and Huron–Bruce. I thank you very much for your comments on Bill 165.

I also want to take this opportunity to recognize the current Minister of Children and Youth Services, who had this portfolio in her previous term. I agree with the member from Windsor–Tecumseh that she has done an excellent job on this file. She has consulted widely with experts, individuals and professionals in this field.

I also recognize the Minister of Government and Consumer Services for his support on this bill, as well as his tireless work on consumer protection. I look forward to working with him on strengthening the home inspector industry.

I noticed that members in this House brought up concerns on whether this is being consulted widely. I can assure them that I did the best I could to cast a wide net for opinions, not just to constituents but as well to experts in the industry. Some of those long-time advocates are here with us in the gallery.

I noted that the support is there, but there was some caution to make sure that the details will be looked after.

I look forward to discussions during the committee process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will take the vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY
IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING
ACT, 2016
LOI DE 2016 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE
ET LA RESPONSABILISATION
EN MATIÈRE DE MARCHÉS PUBLICS

Ms. Fife moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 167, An Act to enact the Privatizations and Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act, 2016 and to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008 / Projet de loi 167, Loi édictant la Loi de 2016 sur la transparence et la responsabilisation en matière de privatisations et de partenariats public-privé et modifiant la Loi de 2008 sur la négociation collective dans les collèges.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is always a privilege to be able to introduce a piece of legislation that speaks to and proposes a solution that affects the lives of Ontarians. To say that the crafting of this legislation has been a group effort would be an understatement. I am proud that the voices and experiences of public sector workers are reflected in Bill 167.

Joining us today in the members' gallery are several members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union executive board, including president Smokey Thomas and vice-president and treasurer Eddy Almeida. In addition, Chris Watson is here from CUPE. Welcome back to Queen's Park, and thanks for being here today.

This piece of legislation is long overdue. I think there is some consensus around supporting Bill 167, which, given the body of evidence with regard to poor contract oversight, expense and cost to human life, shouldn't be too surprising. This bill deals with public-private partnerships and the contracting out of public services with regard to P3s, what this government likes to call alternative financing procurement, specific to infrastructure. Given the stated investment promise of now \$160 billion over 12 years, as announced in budget 2016, this debate is timely—given the growing and emerging trend of all levels of government, from all jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, to review and reverse the use of public-private partnerships; given their track record of poor service delivery, cost overruns and high cost of financing.

In this province, recently, a respected academic at the University of Toronto argued that renting money from capital markets is more expensive than issuing government bonds because private investors pay significantly higher interest rates than governments do.

The United Kingdom should serve as a cautionary tale for Ontario. The debate on public-private partnerships—or, as they are called in the UK, private financing initiatives—has come full circle. A 2011 National Audit Office report—the equivalent of our AG—said that the use of P3s “has the effect of increasing the cost of finance for public investments relative to what would be available to the government if it borrowed on its own account,” and “the price of finance is significant higher with a PFI.”

Currently, the British government is paying for the mistakes of billions in P3 spending by slashing public services again and again, something we are already seeing in the province of Ontario.

We should learn from these other jurisdictions that we need to be cautious about P3 contracts. Bill 167 provides a solution that ensures public oversight, transparency and accountability.

Even municipalities in the United States—the city of Chicago is making changes to prevent future P3 boondoggles. In November 2015, their city council passed an ordinance requiring independent evaluation, public hearings and ongoing oversight among other safeguards that will be required for future privatizations of city assets or public services. Their planner even said that it will provide “an insurance policy for the public,” something we need in the province of Ontario. And we agree.

Ontario's Auditor General has done this province a great service by exposing and questioning the practice employed by Infrastructure Ontario around the design, build and financing of P3s. I hope that we can agree that no government should borrow money at rates as high as 28% when they can do so at 2.9%—noting that this was one of the first times that any Auditor General questioned the fundamental methodology of P3s.

The Ontario Auditor General went on to question the whole underpinnings of the risk transfer justification. She found that there was absolutely no empirical data supporting the valuation of the cost of risks transferred to the private sector by P3s. The risks to justify the enormously higher costs, she reported, were anecdotal. Many people know the story now. She reviewed 74 P3 projects. She found that we paid \$8 billion more than the traditional public procurement. That buys a lot of health care.

It needs to be said that those who unequivocally defend the P3 model almost always have a pecuniary interest or a financial interest in the transfer of wealth from the public sector to the private sector. They defend their right to access public dollars, particularly with this government, as a right of access—almost an entitlement.

We, on this side of the House, defend the public. We defend the citizens and their right to transparency of public dollars and their rights and privileges as citizens to have their roads maintained, to have access to a universal health care system and a strong publicly funded education system.

1540

This piece of legislation, Bill 167, asks the government—any government—to make the business case for

contracting out of any public service. We believe the case does not exist, and we have the data and the evidence to prove it. But at the minimum, opening up this information to the broader public is in the public interest. Indeed, they have the right to this information.

Now for a little context, Mr. Speaker: When I was first elected to Queen's Park, in 2012, I entered this Legislature when it was embroiled in the gas plant scandal. A contempt motion had been tabled—eventually, an OPP investigation; charges were laid. A cover-up of a conspiracy was afoot. In fact, the court case is quite topical even today. I mention this because had Bill 167 been in place, it is highly unlikely that the government would have been in a position to agree to compensate TransCanada for lost profits even though it had no legal obligation to do so. You'll remember: At the time, the Liberals pledged that TransCanada would be made whole. In this instance, the private and political interests trumped the public interest. We need to learn from this. The nature of those contracts remains a black mark on this government. The only reason we found out the full costing was because it was a minority government.

Access to information about how this government spends your money should be more transparent, should be more responsible and should make more sense. And every dollar that is spent should have some direct correlation to benefiting the citizens of this province.

Over the years, as privatizing public services becomes the default position of this government, the public becomes less and less aware of how tax dollars are being spent. This does not inspire confidence in our economy, our public service or our democracy.

Let me be clear: New Democrats are not against working with the private sector, but we need to ensure that the public interest always comes first and is always protected.

In 2014, Tom Walkom gave an overview of this government's privatization agenda:

"Ontario's Liberal government has an almost pathological desire to involve the private sector in public business.

"When awarding contracts for new power plants, it has favoured private electricity firms over publicly owned....

"It is anxious to contract out the delivery of public medicare services to private clinics.

"For a while, it even privatized regulation, giving industry groups the authority to charge consumers fees for handling electronic and other kinds of waste.

"In one notorious case, the Liberal government established an arm's-length public agency called Ornge to run the province's air ambulance service. Then, inexplicably, it allowed this agency to set up a web of privately owned, profit-making subsidiaries."

It's completely unacceptable.

Finally, he went on to say that the government "insists that large-scale public construction projects, such as hospitals, be handled by private firms paid from the public purse."

This approach doesn't even create good jobs, Mr. Speaker.

As an aside, with regard to the Eglinton Crosstown transit project, for instance, Clive Thurston, who's the chair of Construction Design Alliance Ontario and the president of the Ontario General Contractors Association, criticizes the bundling of P3 projects by stating: "Simply put, bundling the station and maintenance facility construction into one contract has hamstrung the tendering process, limited competition, stifled innovation, and isolated the small and medium-sized construction and design firms." So this is actually hurting the economy.

On the side of public service and contracting out, I don't have enough time to go through all of the scandals, but the body of evidence is growing with each passing year, and it needs to stop.

While some may say Bill 167 is onerous, by doing the due diligence you'll actually be saving money down the line. This is a scandal-saving piece of legislation, and the government should be very interested in it.

Just to review some of the contracting out and the privatization: We had the chemotherapy drug debacle between February 2012 and March 2013, when 1,200 patients at four hospitals in Ontario received watered-down chemotherapy drugs.

We had the SAMS scandal, when this government introduced a new system for social assistance. It was expected to cost \$242 million, and yet a year afterwards it was \$50 million more, and \$20 million in social assistance had been mistakenly overpaid, and some welfare recipients didn't receive their intended payments. This system means it takes longer for people to qualify for social assistance, and low-income Ontarians are worse off than before. Outsourcing IT is not cheaper, it's not more efficient, and it often hurts the people whom we're supposed to be serving.

The child abuse prevention database: This is a heart-breaking issue. CPIN is supposed to be, one day, a unified database connecting all children's aid societies. This came out of the Jeffrey Baldwin inquest. It was supposed to be in place in February 2016; it will not be in place until 2019. Why is this acceptable, Mr. Speaker?

The CCACs: The Auditor General found that 39% of the funding that went to CCACs was being contracted out and was going to profit, administration and bureaucracy.

Road maintenance: While the government saved millions of dollars on road maintenance, the AG found that, in 2015, it was taking twice as long to clear highways to bare pavement, and people are being hurt. If Bill 167 had been in place, for instance, road maintenance contracts would not have been awarded to companies that didn't even have the equipment to complete the work, that didn't do the work because it affected their profit margins, that were then fined for not performing the work. And they wouldn't have to explain why they haven't even bothered to collect the \$33 million in fines. It does amaze me, Mr. Speaker, that this government can't collect MTO fines that they levied, but they can claw back social assistance from the poorest families in the province of Ontario.

Finally, if this government was bound by Bill 167, they would have had to make the business case to sell off Hydro One, and that does not exist. It does not. This government, under the leadership of Ed Clark, has refused to share the economic analysis with the Financial Accountability Officer. This option would not have been open to the Premier and the Minister of Finance to sell off Hydro One. It is not in the interest of the people of this province. The people of this province know it, and moving ahead will only hurt them. Bill 167 would stop that.

The sell-off of Hydro One is a breach of trust.

I urge all parties to support this step forward for accountability and greater transparency in this bill.

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

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'm delighted to stand up today and speak to Bill 167, An Act to enact the Privatizations and Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act, 2016 and to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008.

When I was listening to the member from Kitchener–Waterloo speak, what I noticed was that she spent so much time on a negative rant, she ran out of time to actually speak to—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock.

The Minister of Children and Youth Services and the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, if you wish to carry on a debate and are not the speaker, I would ask you to go outside. If you're going to stay here, you're going to remain quiet.

Start the clock.

Continue.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: As I was saying, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo was so busy on a negative rant that she ran out of time to actually speak to what her bill might do. I'm going to do what she ought to have done and actually speak to the bill.

The wordy title of this bill hints at the redundancy of the bill—redundancy, Mr. Speaker, because much of what the bill sets out to do is already being done. The bill reminds me of a person who rushes out of their home and runs to a grocery store to buy a carton of milk, only to come home and open the fridge to realize that there's plenty of milk in the fridge. If only the person had checked the fridge before rushing out to the grocery store to buy more milk, she would have known there was plenty of milk in the fridge and would have saved herself a trip to the grocery store and some money. In the same way, if only the MPP for Kitchener–Waterloo had checked to see what the government is already doing, she would have realized that much of what she's proposing is already being undertaken.

To be clear, I have no quarrel at all with the overarching goal of the bill, which is transparency and accountability. What is at issue is how to achieve the transparency and accountability. What is at issue is the

bill's failure to recognize the strides that this government has already made in ensuring transparency and accountability across government, but especially around public-private partnerships.

The bill sets out to—and I quote from the proposed bill: “The preliminary analysis”—

Interjections.

1550

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock.

The minister responsible for infrastructure, the Minister of Agriculture, the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, the member for Timmins–James Bay—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I could stand here all afternoon. I have no place to go tonight.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. The member in your own party had a chance to speak and the House was very quiet.

I would ask all of you to give the speaker a chance so that I can hear what's going on. From now on, you'll get warnings and you'll probably be named.

Start the clock.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I quote from her bill: “The preliminary analysis must include an analysis of the viability, the expected risks, costs and benefits of using a private sector entity....” It's a great idea, Mr. Speaker. There's just one problem: We're already doing it. Infrastructure Ontario already makes bids value-for-money methodology, and project information publicly available on their website.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you another example of the redundancy of this bill. The bill proposes, “The Financial Accountability Officer must then conduct a review of the preliminary analysis and must provide at least 60 days for comments from the public....” Again, it's a great idea. The only problem is we're already doing it. The Financial Accountability Officer and the Auditor General already have the power to look into any project the government undertakes.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you yet another example of the redundancy in the proposed bill. Again, I quote from the bill: “The public sector entity must, if it still chooses to continue with the privatization, submit the final report and contract summary to the Auditor General for review and comment.” Again, it's a great idea. The only problem is we're already doing it. Each P3 project that IO undertakes already undergoes rigorous analysis, including third-party consultants, to ensure it is appropriate for the AFP model.

I could go on, but in the interest of time I'm going to stop with these examples. Mr. Speaker, you see a trend here: It's a well-intentioned bill, but it's proposing initiatives that the government is already doing. Now I know that the member from Kitchener–Waterloo will argue that the government isn't doing things exactly as the bill proposes. I know she's going to argue we are not doing it exactly her way, but there is reason—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Durham, if you're going to speak, you're on the microphone. Would you please stay quiet?

The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, you're warned.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The point I was making was, there is a reason we don't do it the way her bill is proposing. It really speaks to the idea that we must not under-regulate, but at the same time we must not over-regulate. We believe we've got the balance right and we've got the evidence. The evidence is, the Auditor General herself agrees that Infrastructure Ontario has delivered 98% of the projects on time and either under budget or on budget. The fact is, Infrastructure Ontario is the best in its class in the world today. It really speaks to the fact that we got that regulation and that balance right.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, all I wanted to reiterate is, I really do support the member opposite's intention and the principle behind the bill, but I do believe that if she had only checked to see what the government is already doing, we wouldn't have to debate this bill today. My advice to her is, the next time she's going out to buy some milk perhaps she can check the fridge first.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I am privileged to stand and talk to the Transparency and Accountability in Government Contracting Act, as put forth by the member from Kitchener–Waterloo.

It is interesting to me how squeamish the government gets when they hear the words “transparency” and “accountability.” It's something that this side has certainly mentioned for as long as I've been in this place—how secretive they can be on some of these things.

We believe more oversight is needed in this area. We appreciate the concept of involving the auditor and the Financial Accountability Officer in the review and oversight process when it comes to procurement. We believe that this deserves further consideration.

I want to relate something from my riding that I think will prove this point.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock.

Thank you very much. Start the clock.

Continue.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker.

Accountability and transparency—what a novel idea; it really is. When I got involved in politics, one of the reasons was certainly what these two words meant.

I want to relate to you a story from my riding concerning accountability and transparency. I believe that, certainly, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo has really put some points forward that will back this up.

Sir, you might remember when the Green Energy Act was enacted in Ontario, and the devastating effects it had on rural Ontario. I remember the Premier at the time saying that he wasn't going to stand for NIMBYism. The

reason he did that is because he knew there was going to be pushback, especially with the wind turbines. So he took the planning rights away from municipalities concerning these things. That's something that we didn't know. I was a councillor at that time, and when I found out about it, it certainly was something that surprised us at that time.

We then found out that one of the reasons that this was done was because there were contracts signed at exorbitant prices for electricity. We found these things out later.

I would suggest that this government take notice of the two words “accountability” and “transparency” in anything that they are doing. I want to commend the member for putting that in this act, because it's something that this government has an issue with at times.

We have concerns that this could become a very onerous process to procure major infrastructure projects. It could add months, if not years, to the timeline to get needed infrastructure built. We do not want to keep the shovels from going into the ground and slow what little progress is being made in Ontario.

This act would also appear to force companies chosen by the government to provide public services to disclose financial and other information. It is unclear whether that would even be legal, and we certainly would recommend that further clarification on this would be brought forward.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm proud to rise to speak to Bill 167, a bill brought forward by my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo—in favour, obviously, because it does a number of important things to actually bring some transparency to the government's initiatives around contracting out and privatization initiatives, which we know have led to boondoggle after boondoggle in this province, have led to a lack of accessibility of some of the public services that this province provides and a lack of oversight, frankly, in a number of areas.

This bill does a great deal on a number of different fronts. We've already heard from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo around some of the specific boondoggles. We're talking about Ornge air ambulance and a number of the other specifics that she raised, the big one of course being the \$8 billion of overspending that this government undertook in their alternative financing and procurement model of financing infrastructure projects. I don't think a day goes by when the Premier of this province doesn't stand in her place and talk about all of the investments the Liberals are making on infrastructure and all of the plans that the Liberals have to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on infrastructure. And yet what they're not telling the public is the fact that they've wasted billions of dollars on infrastructure. What we should be getting is a tally of how many subways we could have built if the priority of the Liberals hadn't been making sure they were feathering the nests of their friends and of the well-connected on Bay Street instead of making sure that every single public dollar goes to the benefit of the general public in the province of Ontario.

1600

However, there are certainly a number of my colleagues who are also going to want to speak to this bill, so I'm not going to take too much time myself, except to say that it is much too important an initiative to continue to ignore. I congratulate the member for Kitchener–Waterloo for actually bringing forward some practical ideas about how to clean up what this government has been doing when it comes to infrastructure and privatization.

I say that because we know that the privatization schemes have gone as badly as the infrastructure schemes and they need to be cleaned up. It's unfortunate because infrastructure is something that actually can do a lot for the province. It certainly creates jobs. It allows us to ensure that we can train the next generation of workers, for example, in terms of the apprenticeship programs for registered apprenticeships and making sure that the tradespeople are able to train their next generation of people to help us to make sure our infrastructure is safe and of the highest quality.

When you're doing things the way that this government is doing them, the way that was described by the member for Kitchener–Waterloo, we don't get those benefits because what happens is we end up in a situation where one hand doesn't know what the other hand is doing, where we have 20 different general contractors on a site, nobody knows who the boss is and everybody is working at cross purposes. That's certainly the feedback that I've gotten in terms of these megaprojects that the government puts out to tender.

There certainly needs to be some work done there, and this bill goes a long way to do that. In fact, one of the things that the president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, Smokey Thomas, who's here with us today, says about this bill is that it lifts the veil on the contracting out and privatization that this government has been undertaking. I think it's absolutely time that that veil is lifted.

There are certainly some of the things more recently around SAMS and the boondoggle on the IT with SAMS and other ones that I'm sure are coming down the pike, but there are more things than that. When you look at what has happened with privatization in this province, we see so many services and so many initiatives that the public used to have provided by a reliable, accountable, transparent public process that are now in the hands of the private sector. I think about things like driver testing, for example. ServiceOntario has gone through I don't know how many iterations. In fact, this government put a bunch of kiosks out there to take the place of real people and then had to dial that back because that was a big mistake as well.

There's no doubt that there needs to be much more scrutiny and much more attention to what this government is doing when it's privatizing our public services because what we end up with is not only mistakes like the ones that happened with the chemotherapy drugs but mistakes that can actually be life-threatening. We've seen

mistakes that occur because people's private information that they trust their government will keep private ends up getting into the hands of people that have no business getting that information. I think the people of Ontario would much rather have their personal and private information in the hands of trusted public workers than they would in some private company who's more interested in profiting off of it than anything else—selling that information, perhaps, to some of their other colleagues in the private sector.

There are many instances in the health care sector where we've seen privatization. We've seen labs, for example, in hospitals being sent out to the private sector, and now all of a sudden there's consolidation in those labs and some of them are shutting down. If it was a public service, you could be sure that the government would be responsible and responsive to complaints about shutting down lab services. Now that they're in the private sector, it's all about how the private sector can get more money and more economy of scale for lab services because they're no longer being done in the hospital to the extent that they were, Speaker. Again, the further privatization of hospital services is a serious concern of Ontarians.

When I first became elected, I was serving as a councillor at city council. This was when the Conservative government downloaded all kinds of services to municipalities. I sat in one of my first meetings where the head of that region was pushing a sole-source contract for paramedics in my community, and if it wasn't for me realizing that this is not only a sole-source contract but a contracting out of public services, that's quite possibly something that could have happened in Hamilton. That's not acceptable and certainly not what Hamiltonians would have wanted to see.

Of course, the biggest privatization that's facing the people of Ontario these days is the privatization of Hydro One.

I haven't done the math yet, I haven't done the tallying yet—I shouldn't call it “math”—but I have to say that I'm pretty concerned that, just looking at the budget numbers that we've seen year over year the last number of years, we are seeing a significant erosion of the quality and the accountability of the services provided to the people of Ontario because the Premier of Ontario has actually implemented the promises from the Conservatives' playbook in the last election. So I don't know if it's 100,000 jobs yet, but I expect it's getting pretty close.

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

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It gives me great pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 167, the Transparency and Accountability in Government Contracting Act. I know the member from Kitchener–Waterloo—this is an area she's very interested in. I'm happy to see that she's coming around to supporting the P3 model, and she has some interesting ideas on how to improve on it.

I'm very pleased to stand and reaffirm our government's commitment to transparency and accountability,

and debate how to best deliver important infrastructure projects in Ontario.

Public-private partnerships are a world-renowned and accepted best practice for delivering important infrastructure projects. Since the early 2000s, our government has judiciously used the P3 or alternative financing procurement model. In doing so, our government has saved Ontarians \$6.6 billion over the course of 74 projects and established Ontario as a world leader for alternative financing. The world comes to Ontario to see how we are doing it right.

I'm glad that the member opposite has taken this interest in our infrastructure procurement process and, like the member opposite, I recognize that Ontario gets the best results from the AFP model when our infrastructure procurement process is transparent and public and private sector partners are held accountable. However, I'd like to also point out that most of the suggestions in this bill have already been implemented and contributed to Ontario's impressive track record.

Infrastructure Ontario already makes bid, value-for-money methodology and project information publicly available on their website. Each P3 project that IO undertakes also undergoes rigorous analysis, including third-party consultants, to ensure it is appropriate for the AFP model—and not every project is recommended for an AFP model. Furthermore, the Financial Accountability Officer and the Auditor General both have the power to look into any project the government undertakes.

Nevertheless, I believe Bill 167 may still contain some valuable contributions. I'm happy to support legislation that has the potential to improve transparency and accountability, and I look forward to hearing more from other colleagues who are debating this matter.

Just as a personal experience that I've had overseeing how large-scale procurements for major infrastructure projects are done—I note that the leader of the third party mused as to how many more subways could have been built if we had not used P3. Well, Mr. Speaker, as a commissioner of the Toronto Transit Commission, I fought for the TTC to undertake a proper P3 process for the York-University-Spadina extension. The commission chose not to and now we see massive cost overruns and multi-year delays on that project. The chair of the TTC at that time was, I believe, the one-time president of the NDP. He was very opposed to a P3 model. Now we're paying hundreds of millions of dollars more, and commuters in northwestern Toronto and Vaughan aren't able to use the subway, which should have already been opened. That is a real example in our province today where a P3 could have delivered better results.

1610

Mr. Speaker, these very large infrastructure projects entail great risk, and when this —

Ms. Andrea Horwath: You don't have to put 30% down when you mitigate risk.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The leader of the third party, would you come to order?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Mr. Speaker, it's only when this risk is properly assessed, when the rigors of the fiscal discipline of a private sector company that knows they are taking on this risk—when you do that, then you can deliver projects on budget and on time. The traditional model, with public agencies doing this, was open-ended. There wasn't the same accountability; there wasn't the same rigor. The taps were simply open.

I'm very proud to be a part of a government that has become a world leader in these procurement projects.

I believe the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care mentioned the figure that some 98% of IO projects that were done with the P3 model were delivered on time and on or under budget. That is what delivers more value for Ontarians. That is what builds more infrastructure for Ontarians. That is what guarantees that we can actually make those crucial investments that will help promote prosperity, create more jobs in this province and provide the key infrastructure that we all need to do our work, to get home, and to do the various activities we undertake.

Many of the points in this bill are good, but many of them have already been implemented by our government. But I'm very happy to see that the member from Kitchener-Waterloo is now more supportive of the P3 process.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to participate in this afternoon's debate of the Transparency and Accountability in Government Contracting Act, particularly as my party's critic for training, colleges and universities. It's within that context that I'd like to address schedule 2 in the draft legislation, dealing with the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008.

It appears that it has just been lumped into the proposed legislation. It looks like an afterthought. It was disconnected almost entirely from the discussion that rightfully ensues around the substantive matter of procurement of major infrastructure projects that are reflected in the legislation.

I'm uncertain, without a much more comprehensive analysis, exactly how the proposed amendment in schedule 2 would impact colleges in this province, defined in the legislation that underpins the colleges of applied arts and technologies established under the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002. But I'm certain that this proposed amendment deserves discussion and debate on its own merit.

Clearly, the issue, as I see it, is that if we're here to have a fulsome discussion on the merits of an amendment to the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008, then let's extract it from the bill being discussed today and deal with it on its own merits.

I look forward to subsequent discussion with the member for Kitchener-Waterloo on that aspect. Thank you.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise in support of my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo and, frankly, a bill that needed to be introduced and a bill that needs to be passed in this Legislature.

My time is limited. I want to pick out one example of a privatization scheme that illustrates everything that can go wrong. In the course of the gas plant scandal, I had the opportunity to look at the Oakville plant being put forward by Eastern Power.

Speaker, as you're well aware, that plant was being financed at interest costing 14% per year. I think the best phrase in response to this was that of former finance minister for the Liberals Dwight Duncan, who said, "Who knew that they would go to Short-Neck Louie down at the corner to get a loan?" I thought, "Yes, Dwight, for once, you nailed it. We disagreed on everything else, but you nailed it there."

Speaker, privatization means movement to financing on very disadvantageous terms and much higher rates for the public. Time after time, we've seen it; I think it's proven.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 167, An Act to enact the Privatizations and Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act, 2016 and to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008.

Speaker, it sounds more like an omnibus bill. It's the first I've seen in private members' legislation.

I commend the member from Kitchener–Waterloo for her concern over the lack of oversight by this Liberal government, as it has cost the people of Ontario billions of dollars for projects overseen by this government. Projects such as the Canada-US bridge in Windsor; the Nipigon River Bridge, the Pan Am Games, and the Union-Pearson Express train are just a few of the recent construction scandals that have cost Ontarians so dearly. I'm sure—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): There are about 10 conversations on my right, and I cannot hear the speaker. I would ask those who have carried on a conversation if you would take it outside, so that at least I can hear the speaker.

Carry on.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We talk about these scandals, and I'm sure they've contributed to the cuts in education and in health care that we have seen by this government.

Speaker, while we applaud the scrutiny over this Liberal government, we are concerned with the impact that this huge amount of red tape and regulation will have on the ability of government, and future governments, to procure well-designed, well-thought-out and well-built capital projects.

We are happy to see the NDP member acknowledge the importance of private-public partnerships by trying to correct some of the problems that this Liberal govern-

ment is having with the procurement, quality control and the management of cost-effective, practical, large infrastructure projects.

I might suggest that it has nothing to do with the private-public partnerships, or P3s, but more to do with the ability of this government to effectively manage the procurement of any large project. Ornge, eHealth and the gas plants cancellation scandals are just a few more examples of this government not being able to manage a project. We all suffer from their mistakes, their mismanagement and the lack of transparency on these projects.

While we agree with the intent of much of this bill, we need to see significant amendments to ensure that the government of Ontario can achieve the most cost-effective infrastructure that Ontarians need and deserve. Without these amendments, this bill has the possibility of tying up projects for years, adding significant administration costs and unnecessary delays.

Contrary to what this Liberal government and the NDP believe, there is not an unlimited amount of taxes that can be collected from the people of Ontario, nor is there an unlimited source of debt that can be undertaken by this province. As we saw again in this year's Liberal budget, important services are being crowded out by the increasing interest on the excessive debt that they have undertaken.

We agree with the intent of this bill to increase accountability and transparency on this government, and are looking forward to working at committee with the third party to rein in this government and give the people of Ontario the infrastructure they need.

The practice that we've seen in this government of going out to Liberal-friendly companies, and the lack of oversight, is costing us dearly. Transparency is something that everybody in this province believes in and wants.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 167, and I want to congratulate my colleague the member for Kitchener–Waterloo for bringing this forward.

1620

I was listening to the comments by the member for Whitby–Oshawa, who questioned why schedule 2 is included in this bill. Speaker, we have seen, in the college sector in this province, a very dramatic shift toward the privatization of educational programming and the contracting out of educational services. We just have to look at what happened with Algonquin and Niagara setting up campuses in Saudi Arabia. We know that Algonquin College lost almost \$1.5 million of public money in just one year by setting up that Saudi campus. This was an arrangement that was supposed to generate profits of over \$20 million in five years. It is nowhere on track to do that. Those are public dollars that are being used to support a private partnership. We also saw Niagara College lose almost \$1 million on its Saudi campus.

Now, the government, thankfully, has seen the error of its ways and announced that those men-only campuses will be reversed. But we need some legislative protections to ensure that public dollars aren't squandered that way again.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The deputy House leader, come to order.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: We've also seen Ontario colleges entering into partnership agreements with private career colleges to deliver programming. Again, we're seeing public dollars used to subsidize private profit. There is a public interest in ensuring that public dollars support publicly funded education; that they support the high quality of education that is delivered by Ontario college faculty and staff. That is why the successor rights that are guaranteed in schedule 2 of this bill are so important.

The successor rights allow the bargaining unit to continue to represent employees when there is a sale or transfer or other kind of divestment of services to another kind of entity, so that employees who are working in those other entities are part of the public sector and are mandated to provide the high-quality services that we know Ontario college faculty and staff already provide. Currently, there are only successor rights in the case of a merger or amalgamation, so the amendment that is proposed in schedule 2 is very important.

Speaker, we want to ensure that public dollars are protected and that there is proper oversight over public spending. This bill is critical to enable the government to do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? Further debate? Last call for further debate.

The member for Kitchener–Waterloo, you have two minutes for a response.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It was an interesting debate, I have to say.

I just want to say to the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care—she told me to check the fridge before I went out to buy some milk. No one is going to be able to keep milk in their fridge because the privatization of the electricity and energy market in this province has gone right through the roof.

I'll leave you with a stat around accountability—this is from the Globe and Mail: the “Auditor General announced that, between 2006 and 2014, thanks to incompetence and mismanagement on the part of the province's Liberal government, Ontarians overpaid for electricity to the tune of \$37 billion.”

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: “And over the next 18 years, consumers will be overpaying ... another \$133 billion.”

If you think we don't need greater accountability and transparency in the finances of this province, and if you actually say to us, “Just trust us,” that ship has sailed. That ship has sunk.

Interjection.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Quite honestly, if any P3 project had to go through open and transparent scrutiny to determine its business value, it would fail, because no business in the province of Ontario, if they value their business, is going to go out and borrow money at 28% when they can borrow it at 3%.

Right now, that entire process is flawed. All you have wanted to do is separate yourself from the responsibility of infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, I just—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock.

The Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, you're warned. The Minister of Infrastructure, I asked you to come to order.

Start the clock.

Carry on.

Ms. Catherine Fife: P3s, in a common-sense world, would not pass this test.

I want to leave you with this one quote, and I share this sentiment from Mr. Kinnear. He says, “I fear that public trust in government will be so eroded by the time our grandchildren are grown up that nobody will remember a time when the trains actually ran on time—a time, already past, when government had the courage to invest directly in building a better future for all Ontarians.”

Support this bill and truly build Ontario up.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs withdraw that statement?

Hon. David Zimmer: Withdraw.

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

The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

RARE DISEASES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 18, standing in the name of Mr. Harris.

Mr. Harris has moved private member's notice of motion number 63. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

We'll take the vote at the end.

LICENSED HOME INSPECTORS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LES INSPECTEURS D'HABITATIONS TITULAIRES D'UN PERMIS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Dong has moved second reading of Bill 165, An Act to regulate home inspectors.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Fife has moved second reading of Bill 167, An Act to enact the Privatizations—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Oh, sorry. My apologies. Pursuant to standing order 98(g), the bill from Mr. Dong has to be referred to committee.

The member for Trinity–Spadina.

Mr. Han Dong: Regulations and private bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that it go to regulations and private bills. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Ten thousand dollars a plate; wow.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Deputy House leader, you're not making my life easy.

TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY
IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING
ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE
ET LA RESPONSABILISATION
EN MATIÈRE DE MARCHÉS PUBLICS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Fife has moved second reading of Bill 167, An Act to enact the Privatizations and Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act, 2016 and to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a bunch of noes.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion will please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We'll take the vote. Call in the members. It'll be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1629 to 1634.

RARE DISEASES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Harris has moved private members' notice of motion number 63.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	French, Jennifer K.	Pettapiece, Randy
Arnott, Ted	Gélinas, France	Sattler, Peggy
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Michael	Scott, Laurie
Barrett, Toby	Hatfield, Percy	Singh, Jagmeet
Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Tabuns, Peter
Clark, Steve	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Coe, Lorne	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.
DiNovo, Cheri	McDonell, Jim	Vanhof, John
Fedeli, Victor	Miller, Paul	Walker, Bill

Fife, Catherine
Forster, Cindy

Munro, Julia
Nicholls, Rick

Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Dong, Han	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Duguid, Brad	Moridi, Reza
Baker, Yvan	Fraser, John	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hoskins, Eric	Potts, Arthur
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kiwala, Sophie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bradley, James J.	Lalonde, Marie-France	Rinaldi, Lou
Chan, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Sousa, Charles
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder	Takhar, Harinder S.
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Vernile, Daiene
Del Duca, Steven	Martins, Cristina	Wong, Soo
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Zimmer, David
Dhillon, Vic	McGarry, Kathryn	
Dickson, Joe	McMeekin, Ted	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 33; the nays are 40.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion lost.

Motion negated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Please open the door for 30 seconds.

TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCOUNTABILITY
IN GOVERNMENT CONTRACTING
ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA TRANSPARENCE
ET LA RESPONSABILISATION
EN MATIÈRE DE MARCHÉS PUBLICS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Ms. Fife has moved second reading of Bill 167, An Act to enact the Privatizations and Public-Private Partnerships Transparency and Accountability Act, 2016 and to amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act, 2008.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	French, Jennifer K.	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Anderson, Granville	Gélinas, France	Nicholls, Rick
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harris, Michael	Pettapiece, Randy
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Potts, Arthur
Bailey, Robert	Horwath, Andrea	Qaadri, Shafiq
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Rinaldi, Lou
Barrett, Toby	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Lalonde, Marie-France	Scott, Laurie
Bisson, Gilles	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Bradley, James J.	Malhi, Harinder	Singh, Jagmeet
Chan, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Clark, Steve	Mantha, Michael	Tabuns, Peter
Coe, Lorne	Martins, Cristina	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crack, Grant	Martow, Gila	Taylor, Monique
Damerla, Dipika	Matthews, Deborah	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dickson, Joe	McDonell, Jim	Vanhof, John
DiNovo, Cheri	McGarry, Kathryn	Vernile, Daiene
Dong, Han	McMeekin, Ted	Walker, Bill
Fedeli, Victor	Milczyn, Peter Z.	Wong, Soo
Fife, Catherine	Miller, Paul	Yakabuski, John
Forster, Cindy	Moridi, Reza	Yurek, Jeff
Fraser, John	Munro, Julia	Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 66; the nays are 0.

1640

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—the member for Kitchener–Waterloo?

Ms. Catherine Fife: There's nothing right now at finance. We can get to this right away: the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that it be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. Agreed? Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): On February 26, 2016, Mr. McNaughton moved the adoption of the recommendations contained in the report of the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly on e-petitions.

Pursuant to the order of the House of earlier today, I'm now required to put the question. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I'm in the middle of a vote.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, part of what the committee on the Legislative Assembly spoke about was the fact that the Clerk would come back to the committee on the e-petition issue and bring back some costing. So I was just trying to get some clarity whether the spirit of the discussion at the committee was going to be acted upon at a later date.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would assume so, but I don't know because—the bill is now carried, and I guess the next phase would be what was in that report.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): On the member's point of order, the report has been adopted, and whatever are the recommendations in that report, that's what will carry forward.

Mr. Steve Clark: On the same point of order, there was a substantive discussion about costs for the system, and the Legislative Assembly committee still is—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): —and that's what will happen.

Orders of the day?

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND LOW-CARBON ECONOMY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR L'ATTÉNUATION DU CHANGEMENT CLIMATIQUE ET UNE ÉCONOMIE SOBRE EN CARBONE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 172, An Act respecting greenhouse gas / Projet de loi 172, Loi concernant les gaz à effet de serre.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker—*Applause.*

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Oh, Speaker, late on a Thursday, unusual things happen.

Speaker, as you are well aware, the NDP supports cap-and-trade, and we want a cap-and-trade system in Ontario that works. It's something that the NDP, federally and provincially, has campaigned on in the past and continues to campaign on. We want a system that is fair, that is effective and that is transparent.

I have to say that the bill before us—and the cap-and-trade system described in the bill before us—falls short of those standards, and it needs substantial improvement. It needs to be improved because without changes, it will damage the credibility of climate action in Ontario and won't give the changes that are needed to actually come to grips with climate change.

The government of the past has needlessly undermined public support for environmental initiatives, because it failed to heed warnings and listen to expert advice. Climate change, Speaker, is too important. We can't afford to make mistakes when we're dealing with this issue. The government needs to get this right. It needs to listen to various voices in this Legislature and across this province, so that whatever bill finally comes before us for a vote is one that will actually be effective, will be fair, will be transparent.

The Ontario NDP wants to make sure that the cap-and-trade system doesn't disproportionately burden low-income Ontarians, or Ontarians with little control over their emissions. Northern Ontarians, people living in remote communities, people who lack access to transit or clean energy: Those people should not bear a disproportionate share of what it will take to make a change. The government needs to help these people reduce their carbon footprints and to save money. It also needs to help them financially get through the transition to a carbon-free future.

In British Columbia and soon in Alberta, low-income families get a rebate to help offset the cost of carbon. In California, there's a law requiring that a certain percentage of cap-and-trade revenues be spent on programs that benefit disadvantaged communities.

Speaker, those are very positive steps taken by California and taken by British Columbia. Unfortunately, no such measures exist in this bill. I say to the Liberals in this chamber that they have a working majority. They can amend this bill and make it address the issues that are addressed substantively in other jurisdictions, without undermining the efforts necessary to come to grips with climate change, and at the same time building the political support that will allow this program to last more than two years.

I have to say that I have followed climate politics globally. I watched, with interest and despair, what happened in Australia when the carbon pricing system in Australia was used as a bludgeon against the Australian Labor Party—their coalition with the Greens. It was used by the Liberal and the National Party as a bludgeon, to roll back those changes and undermine climate action on that continent.

The Quebec government announced its climate change action plan to much fanfare 10 years ago. However, a 2013 report found that Quebec had only cut their greenhouse gas emissions by about 10% of their original goal.

The Ontario government is promising even greater reductions than Quebec had put on the table, with fewer tools. This government needs to learn from the mistakes made in Quebec, and they need to know that we and Ontarians across this province want to see real results, a real reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. They don't just want messaging. They don't simply want a wonderful-sounding bill or a wonderful-sounding plan. They want to see this risk, this looming crisis shunted aside. They want to see this province protected.

1650

This government has recently announced \$325 million worth of programs to be funded from cap-and-trade revenues, but there are no greenhouse gas reduction targets connected to any of the programs that were announced. Although some good work is featured, and that needs to be acknowledged, the investment in co-op and non-profit housing for energy conservation retrofits—badly needed and wisely invested in, but at the same time, greenhouse gas reduction targets weren't tied to those investments. That's critical in terms of determining whether, in the end, the investments were effective, and for the public to know whether or not these investments are ones that are going to make a difference in our lives.

We in the NDP want to see greenhouse gas reduction programs that have real impact. We don't simply want a slush fund established by this bill, which will not provide targeted, verifiable, effective change.

The government's so-called greenhouse gas reduction account is not a special-purpose account. It is an accounting fiction that gives the government total flexibility in how it spends the cap-and-trade revenues.

Because this bill is of great importance, I've actually gone door to door in my riding, doing a canvas poll, stopping at doors, outlining what's in the bill and asking people's opinions. I have to say there's a lot of support for climate action but a great deal of concern about how the money will be spent and whether it will be spent transparently. I would say there are two great Achilles heels for the government with this bill, and one is ensuring that the money is spent and seen to be spent on the goals that have been outlined, and the other is fairness. If those two pieces are missing, this bill, this system that is put in place, will be vulnerable to being rolled back and thrown out in the future. That would be a loss.

The NDP wants the money to flow to a separate account that is separately and transparently audited and directly connected to targeted, measurable and independently verifiable greenhouse gas reductions.

One other feature: This act allows the cap-and-trade system and its administration to be delegated to an unaccountable private corporation that is not subject to public oversight. We've had issues in this province with delegated authorities in the past. The TSSA, the Technical Standards and Safety Authority: That authority did not and has not responded to the public. It has been a problem for the people of Ontario, as well as for the government of Ontario. That approach does not cut it in terms of making this bill useful.

Speaker, I appreciate the chance to speak to the bill. I recognize that we're talking very high stakes here—high stakes environmentally, politically and economically.

The environmental stakes: A failure to take effective action means that we will not be able to curb rising global temperatures, and a failure to act means much higher food prices for us here in Canada and, in many parts of the world, a lack of food. It means a world of unstable and extreme weather that will put people's lives and property at risk. Those are very high stakes.

There are political stakes. No matter what option any government picks for action on climate change, there will be a battle because we're changing the way society is structured. We're changing who is getting wealthy off that society and who is not. So when you make a choice, when a Legislature makes a decision as to what policy direction it should take, it needs to find options that will unify as many people as possible, rather than dividing as much as possible. It has to put forward an approach that secures the greatest possible buy-in. For that reason alone, it's critical that fairness be incorporated into this bill, because without fairness, you won't get the buy-in. It's as simple as that.

Lastly, the economic stakes that are tied to the previous two: Climate change will disrupt our economy. It was interesting to me, reading an article today about an extension of the Yonge subway up into Newmarket. One of the options for dealing with commuters from north of the city is to use rail lines coming in, but unfortunately, because of more extreme weather events, those rail lines are now vulnerable to flooding. So, Speaker, we will see, in this society, more and more constraint on our econom-

ic activities, and more and more constraint on our economic possibilities, if we are not able to bring climate change under control.

Again, in order to get it right, this bill will have to be fair, it will have to be transparent and it will have to be effective. In order to get it right, this bill will have to be part of a larger climate change program that will be fair, transparent and effective, because I believe that pricing carbon is a part of a larger plan, and it cannot be the whole plan. If it is, then that is too small a set of tools to actually accomplish the purpose.

This bill has to be understood in the context of the state of the climate today and what will be coming at us tomorrow. The world, Speaker, is heating up and changing faster than we projected even five years ago. Arctic sea ice, which plays a major role in shaping our climate—some climatologists refer to it as “the world’s thermostat”—is melting at a much faster rate than all of the climate models around the world had ever predicted. As you disrupt that thermostat, you disrupt local weather everywhere. The past two winters we went through were extremely cold here in Ontario. But in Alaska, they were quite warm. As the polar ice cap melts, the rhythm of the seasons is changed, and the potential for disruption becomes far greater.

Yet, Speaker, world action on climate change has been completely inadequate. In 2013, Kevin Anderson, who’s the deputy director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of Manchester in the UK, sent a letter about our global failures to the office of the president of the European Commission. Now, I had an opportunity at the Paris climate summit to listen to Mr. Anderson. He’s a well-recognized climatologist—a bright guy; tough thinker; good with math. He wrote about the European Union’s 2030 climate targets. He wrote:

“Global emissions today are 60% higher than at the time of the first IPCC report in 1990, and in the six years since the last IPCC report ... a further 200 billion tonnes of CO₂ have been released into the atmosphere. As a result, in 2013 the scale of mitigation”—the scale of action that has to be taken to cut greenhouse gas emissions—“required is now an order of magnitude more challenging than it was in 1990.”

Speaker, if it was hard in 1990, it’s 10 times harder now, because 20 years have just passed without the action that was necessary. You don’t see a 60% increase in global carbon dioxide levels without a recognition that what’s been done to date has been a failure. He notes that the European Union “must acknowledge this reality if it is ever to catalyze meaningful action on climate change.”

We too, Speaker, in this Legislative Assembly, have to recognize that reality: that there have been more than two lost decades on this; and that with this bill, we have to have an approach that will actually deliver, and deliver in a way that people in Ontario can buy into, and deliver in a way that actually will make meaningful change.

1700

Increasingly, scientists are talking about the possibility of abrupt climate change. If you talked to scientists 15

years ago, they would have talked about changes happening over a horizon of a century or a century and a half—largely smooth, incremental changes. Those would have been hard enough to adapt to, even at a slow but steady rate of change. Increasingly, it’s being put forward that we are looking at a situation of abrupt climate change, where we would be looking at jagged changes in the world environment that would push many people and many societies to the breaking point.

I just note that in the United States, NASA follows this issue, has a website and publishes current scientific information. They note that the earth is currently projected to warm between 2 and 6 degrees Celsius in the next century. That’s a lot, Speaker. According to them, when global warming has happened at various times in the past two million years, it has taken the planet about 5,000 years to warm 5 degrees—about a thousandth of a degree per year. The predicted rate of warming for the next century is at least 20 times faster.

In the past century alone, temperatures climbed 0.7 degrees Celsius, roughly 10 times faster than the average rate of Ice Age recovery warming. That means we are exposed to a whole range of risks that have never been seen before. We are entering a whole unknown territory of risks and changes, and we can’t fully know the scale of risk that we’re facing.

Speaker, I like to hike in winter. When it’s a good minus 25 or minus 30, I can walk out on a frozen lake and know that I’m safe—a beautiful place to walk. But if you do that in late winter when the ice has begun to melt, even though it’s covered with snow and looks beautiful, you can’t tell where that ice is particularly thin. Speaker, we are in a similar situation. We are walking on ice that increasingly is finding thin patches worn into that surface. We don’t know when things will change abruptly, but we have a very good chance that they will. This is literally true.

Tyler Hamilton wrote in the Toronto Star the other day about Deer Lake, in northern Ontario. It’s a First Nation community that depends on ice roads for goods to get into that community. It has depended on those roads for decades.

He writes: “Historically, those roads could be relied on for 70 to 80 days during winter months. But shorter and warmer winters have significantly narrowed that window, sometimes to fewer than 30 days.

“No community is more aware of the risks than Deer Lake ... former deputy chief Henry Meekis drowned in late 2012 after the ice-road grooming machine he was driving plunged through the ice.”

My guess, Speaker, is that he had gone and groomed those ice roads for many years before that, on the assumption that the ice was frozen solid and he would be safe.

I have to say that the scale of economic risk is one that has not often been addressed. In 2006, the British government commissioned a study. It’s called the Stern Review, after its author, Lord Stern, who commented on the scale of risk. At that time, he wasn’t talking about

how quickly things could come on; he was talking about the level of disruption we faced.

He wrote, "If no action is taken to reduce emissions, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere could reach double its pre-industrial level as early as 2035, virtually committing us to a global average temperature rise of over 2 degrees Celsius."

Speaker, it is generally acknowledged globally—and it may be optimistic—that a 2-degree centigrade rise is the maximum the world could sustain without dramatic disruption.

"Our actions," he wrote, "over the coming few decades could create risks of major disruption to economic and social activity, later in this century and in the next, on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century."

Which person in this House would not see it as critical to avoid a disruption like the Great Depression? Which person in this House, in this Legislature, would not think it important to avoid years as catastrophic as those of World War II?

He noted as well the "emerging evidence of risks that higher temperatures will trigger massive system 'surprises,' such as the melting and collapse of ice sheets and sudden shifts in regional weather patterns like the monsoons. Thus there is a danger that feedbacks could generate abrupt and large-scale changes in the climate and still further losses."

Speaker, real solutions to climate change are deeply connected to income inequality. Right now, for the last few decades, the vast majority of people have seen their income stagnate or drop. It means they are pushed hard. They don't want to see a further drop in their standard of living. And when you push them, Speaker, they will push back. I raise this because any plan that is brought forward to take on climate change has got to be one that addresses fairness and income inequality at the same time. Without that, it will not stand the test of time. It will not get the buy-in that's required.

We've been through this debate before. I was here in 2009, when the last cap-and-trade bill was introduced. I would say that those who were here for that debate should be forgiven for any level of cynicism they might feel about the intentions of the Liberal government when it comes to action.

I'll quote the Minister of the Environment at the time, Mr. John Gerretsen. On September 14, 2009, he said that "we are truly dealing with a phenomenon, with a situation, that absolutely has to be dealt with, and we as a government are doing something about it within the province of Ontario." It was only seven years ago.

"We all know that it will take bold action and a range of strong concerted efforts from every level of government—federal and provincial, in North America, Europe and elsewhere around the world, and across every sector of society—to tackle this challenge."

He went on to say, "That's why our government has made tackling climate change our most critical environ-

mental property." I think he meant "priority," but anyway: "It is, for example, why we introduced our climate change action plan in 2007, with bold, ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets in line with some of the leading jurisdictions in North America."

That climate plan sank without a trace. It left no imprint on the world. The recession, and the closure of coal—something that was started long before that climate plan, something supported by all parties in this Legislature—that plan had virtually no impact. The recession and the closure of coal plants gave us what reductions we've had, and as there has been some recovery from the recession, the lack of a real climate program has meant our emissions have continued to climb. Using a recession as a climate change strategy is a bad plan. It's just a bad plan.

That's the background, Speaker. That's what has been said and done in the past. That's the scale of the risk and crisis that we're facing. Now I want to talk to the bill itself.

The NDP has stressed three main principles for the upcoming cap-and-trade system: that it be effective, that it be fair and that it be transparent. So let's apply these principles to assessing the bill itself.

Talking about effectiveness: We need to have measures that will actually, in a verifiable way, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and we have to have targets that will get us where we want to go to. We have to have accountability.

First, I want to talk about the targets that are set out in the bill. These targets are not as ambitious as the European Union targets, which one can find easily with a quick Google search. Their target is a 20% reduction in 2020, a 40% reduction in 2030 and an 80% reduction in 2050—2050, Speaker. Very few of us will be around for that date. Maybe the pages that are sitting up with you at the front, but most of the rest of the people sitting in this Legislature won't be around for that date.

1710

I have to note that the targets set by the European Union reflect the fact that there is differing ability on the part of different nation states to actually take action. Some have natural resources that give them an opportunity to act more quickly. Some are wealthier; some are less wealthy. So this is the target for the European Union as a whole. The United Kingdom—their government has a climate act that takes those EU targets, sets them as the baseline and then sets deeper targets, reflecting the fact that the UK is much more well off than a country like Poland. It's simply the reality.

In the UK, they've set up a climate change committee by statute that advises the government. It works with the government on doing their carbon budgets, and they reported that in the UK, "emissions were 35% below 1990 levels in 2014 and the first carbon budget has been met." Note—to my colleagues—that Ontario's target was 6% below 1990 levels in 2014 and was only met because of the recession.

The UK has much more aggressive targets. Their target for 2025 is a 50% reduction compared to 1990

levels—much more aggressive. Even then, I'm not saying that the UK is a climate change utopia; I'm just saying that on the face of it, they are looking at the problem and realizing that they have to be far more aggressive than is being proposed in this bill.

We need more aggressive climate change targets. We need better climate change programs because, as I said earlier, we have had two lost decades.

Cap-and-trade is not enough to meet the targets that we need to set. It's not enough to meet the targets that have already been set. In the UK, there's a recognition that the cap-and-trade program is only part of what has to be done by society as a whole to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. In their most recent plan, 60% of their reductions come from activities outside cap-and-trade—the European Union emissions trading system—and 40% come from the cap-and-trade sector.

In California, 15% of California's greenhouse gas reductions come from their cap-and-trade program. In Ontario, the way we've seen planned so far, it looks like 100%. What it appears to me is that this government really has abandoned this since 2007, finds itself way behind and is opening the door to buying large numbers of credits from California to at least say on paper that we've met our targets. That is problematic because we need to invest here in Ontario. We need to invest financially. We need to put in place regulation to dramatically cut the use of fossil fuels here in Ontario, and that is because, to the extent that we invest here and we regulate here, we create more jobs here, and, frankly, we reduce other air pollution problems that come from the burning of fossil fuels, not just greenhouse gas emissions.

We need to learn from what's gone wrong with other jurisdictions. In 2006, the Quebec government announced an action plan to spend \$1.55 billion over six years to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 14.6 megatonnes by 2012. However, a 2013 report found that Quebec had only cut greenhouse gas emissions by less than two megatonnes—only about 10% of their original goal.

The report found that Quebec's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to the transportation of merchandise resulted in a mere 8% cut as compared to the plan's projections.

Another plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, food production, forestry and municipalities resulted in a cut that was less than 1% of the plan's projections.

L'Association québécoise de lutte contre la pollution atmosphérique described the poor results as a "fiasco." Greenpeace was similarly scathing, saying that the government's great-sounding climate change plan had collapsed like a deflated balloon.

Quebec's Sustainable Development Commissioner warned about these disappointing results in his 2012 report which revealed that Quebec would not meet its 2012 GHG reduction targets. The report also said that the problems were evident from the beginning, noting that the government's plan lacked defined goals, timelines

and accountability measures: "The objectives are vague and are neither quantified nor accompanied by a timetable. The strategy is therefore general in scope; it does not make it possible to anticipate results or evaluate government performance over time."

We need to look at what went wrong in Quebec and we need to make sure that we don't repeat their mistakes. It's vital.

British Columbia's climate change policies similarly came under fire from its Auditor General, John Doyle. In 2013, Doyle reviewed British Columbia's carbon-neutral government policy which obliged BC's public sector to become carbon neutral through the purchase of carbon offsets from private companies. Doyle found that "the majority of offsets purchased to meet government's carbon-neutral goal in 2010 were not credible." The government was paying offsets to private companies for carbon reductions that would have happened anyway without the offset program.

Doyle examined two projects that received 70% of BC's public offset money in 2010. The Auditor General said, "In industry terms, these projects would be known as 'free riders.' Together, they received \$6 million in revenue for something that would have happened anyway."

The British Columbia government rejected the Auditor General's report, claiming the Auditor General lacked the necessary expertise to understand the complexities of the offset program. It sort of reminds me of a situation we've seen here with our own Auditor General, rightly criticizing electricity planning in Ontario. Even so, Speaker, BC later closed down the Pacific Carbon Trust, the government's crown carbon offset agency, and transferred the offset program to the environment ministry.

The government's Cap and Trade Program Design Options document says, "Cap-and-trade will be the primary tool for achieving Ontario's 2020 target." Again, Speaker, contrast that with California, which projects that 85% of its emissions reductions will come from complementary programs other than cap-and-trade. I think this is a fundamental problem in Ontario's strategy, and one that has to be addressed: an over-reliance on cap-and-trade when it comes to greenhouse gas reductions.

Cap-and-trade can be a useful thing; carbon pricing can be a useful thing. But it has to be understood in the perspective of a larger climate action plan and not be subjected to a whole bunch of hype about what it can do when, normally, it doesn't do it—it's not used that way. Effectiveness is a key matter. Let's learn from those other jurisdictions. Let's not repeat their mistakes.

I now want to speak to the question of fairness—fairness, first of all, for low- and middle-income households, and the need to provide for low-income and northern and remote support. Unfortunately, we don't see that in this bill or the minister's statements or the consultation document that the ministry put out a few months ago. That, Speaker, is a shocker. I don't think BC is a particularly progressive jurisdiction, but they recognize that it was something that had to be addressed.

When you look at the UK's climate budgeting plans, they actually talk about fuel poverty and how to address it. I have to say, I don't expect that they run an energy utopia. I would be shocked if anyone would say they ran an energy utopia, but they at least recognized that this is a substantial issue—one that has to be addressed, one that has to be taken into account—when they put together their climate plans.

In British Columbia, the carbon tax system provides up to \$200 per year per household for rural and northern households. In British Columbia, low-income households are paid rebates to help cope with higher fuel prices—almost \$400 per year for a family of four. Speaker, we can have a debate about whether that's the right amount or the wrong amount, but I have to say, that jurisdiction has gone through elections in which the carbon tax survived because they actually made concessions to fairness. A refusal to make concessions to fairness does not augur well for the future of this program.

1720

When you think about it, we have a health care system that benefits the whole society. Certainly it benefits individuals, but it benefits the whole society. We understand that people with high incomes are in a position to put more money in, and those with low incomes can only put in a small amount of money. But we know that the society as a whole benefits from funding of health care through a progressive tax system. We understand the benefits that come from that.

Taking action on climate change will benefit the whole society. Some will be able to contribute more than others, and the program and the plan have to be structured to recognize that and build in that support.

Low-income people spend a disproportionate share of their income on home heating, motor vehicle fuel and other expenses. Policies that increase the costs of these expenditures will have a disproportionate impact on low-income households.

A 2011 report, which was updated in 2013, by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Sierra Club, studied British Columbia's carbon tax from a perspective of fairness and social justice. The CCPA and Sierra Club noted that the carbon footprint of the people in the top 20% of income earners is not quite double that of people in the bottom 20%. Yes, high-income people burn more fossil fuels than low-income people. Meanwhile, the median after-tax income in the top group is more than five times the median after-tax income in the bottom group.

They write: "Relative to income, a carbon tax, like sales or consumption taxes, will have a regressive pattern—that is, low-income individuals and families will pay a greater share of their income to the tax because they consume all of their available income, and more"—they use household debt to fill in that gap—"and pay a greater proportion of their household budgets for energy. Higher-income households will pay more tax in absolute dollars because they consume more, but will pay a smaller share of that income to the tax."

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Sierra Club report also notes that lower-income households have much less control over their emissions. "For example, renters in apartment buildings will have more difficulty reducing heat or making investments in energy efficiency upgrades, and people living in suburban or rural areas will be much more automobile-dependent for their mobility." It's simple reality.

The Minister of Agriculture is here. He can speak about people in the rural areas around Peterborough who, my guess is, have to rely on their cars much more than people in downtown Toronto, because in the downtown part of Toronto, Ottawa and Hamilton, there are transit systems. However inadequate we may find them at times, they are there, and they're an option.

The CCPA and Sierra Club report recommends a higher low-income rebate for British Columbia: "Half of carbon tax revenues should be used to fund a new refundable tax credit that reaches more households than the current low-income credit. We model a scenario where the bottom half of households"—and that's up to \$60,000 worth of income—"would receive, on average, more in credits than they pay in carbon tax."

In 2014, the Pembina Institute, well regarded in these matters, put out a fact sheet that identified four principles of a fair and effective carbon pricing system. One of these principles was, "Help low-income families be part of the solution."

In its submission to the provincial government in December 2015, the Canadian Environmental Law Association recommended: "There should be a legislated requirement to use revenue from the cap-and-trade program to counteract impacts of the program on low-income communities."

The submission recommends that at least 25% of cap-and-trade revenue, possibly more, should be used to mitigate the impacts on "low-income, First Nation and other marginalized communities."

Then the Canadian Environmental Law Association reaffirmed these principles in its February 2016 briefing, *Fair and Equitable Carbon Pricing: Comments on Ontario's Cap and Trade Program*.

I'm going to quote from that report because I think it should exist in our record, and because I think what they have to say is very important. They say, "The burdens of climate change are fundamentally unjust: Vulnerable communities that are responsible for the least carbon emissions are faced with the most severe effects of climate change. It is essential that Ontario achieve rapid and deep emissions reductions, however, carbon pricing programs are known to be regressive in that they unevenly affect vulnerable, low-income communities."

The cap-and-trade legislation must also provide explicit support for low-income and vulnerable communities in this transition. CELA, the Canadian Environmental Law Association, notes that the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change "indicated that it considers the issue of the use of proceeds from the cap-and-trade program not to be strictly within the scope of the program design."

Well, Speaker, if you want to be really strict, that may be true, but if you're talking about a program that works for the people of Ontario overall, you can't just be a technocrat. You have to think about people across the income spectrum, across the geographical spectrum, and design your program accordingly.

They write, "The design of the cap-and-trade program, however, will determine whether Ontario will have the resources to assist low-income communities with carbon reduction, or whether it will impose the double burden of climate change and regressive carbon pricing impacts on those most in need."

They note that "when Ontario experiences more frequent and severe extreme weather events, low-income individuals and remote communities are most vulnerable to infrastructure disruptions. The rising price of food caused by disruptions to the global production/supply chain will impact already food-insecure, low-income communities the hardest. Changes to plant and animal species ranges and the surge in invasive species will disproportionately affect First Nations traditional and subsistence food sources."

They conclude, "The cap-and-trade program, as proposed, does not adequately protect marginalized Ontarians. Their disproportionately high burden of climate change is twofold: They experience the negative impacts of a changing climate much more severely, and they are most affected by the pass-through costs of carbon pricing. Ontario's cap-and-trade proposal is an opportunity to tackle greenhouse gas emissions while also lifting underprivileged communities out of a cycle of poverty."

Speaker, their paper is thoughtful, comprehensive, logical and in tune with the realities of Ontario. But they aren't the only ones who have made such comments. The Clean Economy Alliance in their report *Getting It Right: Design Recommendations for Ontario's Cap-and-Trade System* recommended that some cap-and-trade revenues be used for "mitigation of climate impacts on low-income and otherwise marginalized communities."

As I noted previously, BC's carbon tax has a special rebate for low-income families. A 2012 California law mandates that at least 25% of cap-and-trade auction revenues must be spent on programs that benefit disadvantaged communities. Alberta's new carbon tax plan proposes a consumer rebate, which would be sufficient to offset the impact of carbon pricing on most households in the bottom 60% of income in Alberta and would make most low-income Albertans much better off.

Speaker, it is not politically impossible to design climate programs that actually make a difference in terms of low-income households. It is entirely possible. In fact, it is politically necessary and ethically necessary to make those changes.

Meanwhile, the Ontario government's Cap-and-Trade Program Design Options document from November 2015 lists "Overarching Design Principles." The principle of fairness is not one that is listed, nor does fairness receive much consideration in the government stakeholder feedback report from January 2016.

In Ontario, people living in remote and northern communities face a disproportionate burden with few options available for reducing it. Not only are their energy needs greater because of colder temperatures, they often lack access to low-carbon choices that are commonly available in southern Ontario, such as transit. In fact, while GO bus service in the south is subsidized and carries no sales tax, the Ontario Northland bus service is expected to be self-funding, and riders must pay HST on their fares. In order to cut costs, the Ontario Northland transit corporation recently raised fares by 6%, closed bus terminals and reduced service. Is that going to help people take on greenhouse gas emissions? Will that help them cut their car use? I don't think so. This comes after the government promised enhanced bus service to replace the Ontario Northland rail service, which the government cut in 2012.

1730

One can say very clearly that here is a program, on one side, saying that we're going to do a lot about greenhouse gas reductions, and on the other side, concrete actions that make it more difficult for people in northern Ontario to reduce their carbon footprint. That does not augur well for the Liberal climate plan.

I want to turn lastly to the question of transparency. In the 2015 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, the government projects that the cap-and-trade system will generate \$300 million in 2016-17 and \$1.3 billion in 2017-18. The government has committed to "ensuring that all proceeds from a cap-and-trade program would be dedicated to actions that reduce GHG emissions and build the foundation of new sustainable prosperity for the province's households and businesses."

In the fiscal review, the government also proposed to create a Green Investment Fund "that will be targeted at reducing greenhouse gas emissions while strengthening the economy. Through this initial investment, the fund will support energy retrofits in homes (including affordable housing), energy-efficiency investments in small and medium-sized businesses and industry, support for aboriginal communities, and new investments in electric vehicle infrastructure." The fund will be seeded by a \$325-million down payment—government sources all.

But it's not clear whether all cap-and-trade funds will flow to the fund or exactly what it means for cap-and-trade revenue to be dedicated, and this is a government that likes to play games with dedicated funds, as we've seen with last December's very quiet dismantling of the Trillium Trust as a special-purpose account dedicated to infrastructure. Playing games with climate change funds is playing with dynamite: dangerous all around.

The bill before us sets up an accounting procedure known as the greenhouse gas reduction account to track accounting transactions associated with the cap-and-trade system. Unlike the existing greenhouse gas reduction account that was established with Bill 185 in 2009 to receive cap-and-trade revenue, this new account does not record the in-flows and out-flows of money like a piggy bank. The greenhouse gas reduction account is now an

abstract accounting procedure with rules for when the balance in the account may increase and when it can decrease. Carbon allowance sale revenue, system fees and penalties are to be recognized by an entry in the account, which is not the same thing—not at all the same thing—as saying that cap-and-trade money will actually flow into this account. The balance of the account can be reduced by an amount equal to any expenditure related, and I love this phrasing, “directly or indirectly”—because indirectly can be pretty tenuous.

My colleague from Parkdale–High Park can talk about the Union Pearson Express and how someone might say that indirectly it helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions. One could then say, “Well, we could allocate money to the deficit from the Union Pearson Express,” and the money will have been correctly allocated. I think people would go out of their minds. I think they would be extraordinarily angry.

Speaker, it's not just this language, “directly or indirectly,” talking about expenditures for this greenhouse gas reduction account. We could talk about the administration or enforcement of the cap-and-trade program that the government believes “is reasonably likely to reduce, or support the reduction of, greenhouse gas and costs relating to any other initiatives that are reasonably likely to do so,” or any reimbursements to the government for costs related directly or indirectly to these purposes. We're starting to get into really tenuous territory here, really vague “Yeah, it looks kind of green; I think we'll pay for it out of that account” territory.

In fact, the Financial Accountability Officer has commented on the most recent budget, and he has an interesting commentary. He says, “Assuming that both cap-and-trade proceeds and the expected new federal transfers will largely be tied to new spending initiatives, both sources of revenue may prove to be fiscally neutral...” But, he says, “It is unclear to what extent these new revenues”—he's talking about cap-and-trade—“will be directly tied to new program spending or can be used to fund existing spending commitments.” In other words, Speaker, this money that's being collected could be used to flow and deal with other political problems the government has as long as someone can put a very thin coat of green paint on them—and maybe not even a full coat of paint, maybe just a green Magic Marker. That's all you need.

The criteria are loose and the accounting is so abstract, there's no guarantee any of the cap-and-trade revenue will deliver meaningful, independently verifiable greenhouse gas reductions. That is a huge risk, and I say it to everyone in this chamber who's concerned about climate change. To the extent that we reproduce what was done in British Columbia where a fund was set up that effectively had no impact on greenhouse gas reductions that allowed funding of projects that would have gone forward without that money; and to the extent that the people of Ontario don't see this as legit, then the credibility of the program is profoundly undermined and the government needs to change this bill so that not only

is the disposition of the money clean but it is seen and understood to be clean. It needs it for credibility. That is a great moment in this bill, in this matter.

The legislation is written to allow cap-and-trade money to be applied even against projects that are already funded within the current fiscal framework, thus freeing up money to be spent on anything. Right now, the minister must provide a review to the Treasury Board for any project whose funding is to be attributed to the greenhouse gas reduction account. This review may—may—consider various things, such as potential greenhouse gas reductions of the initiative or its relationship to the action plan. There appears to be no requirement that the review be made public.

What if the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change gets a program proposal put on his desk and he concludes that this won't make any difference at all? The Treasury Board or the management board can say, “We want that project anyway. Your review will never be public. It'll be buried. It's a cabinet document. No one will ever read this.” The ability for people to hold the government to account and feel that they can hold the government to account is profoundly weak the way this is written, and that undermines climate action in this province. That undermines climate action.

The experience in Quebec shows why this could be a concern. Just like Ontario's proposal, all the revenues from Quebec's cap-and-trade system are committed to a Green Fund. But an April 2015 report from Clean Energy Canada summarizing the findings of various observers of Quebec's cap-and-trade system questioned the transparency of the Green Fund expenditures, noting that this money often serves “highly political objectives.”

The Green Fund spending in Quebec was also criticized by Quebec's Sustainable Development Commissioner Jean Cinq-Mars. Cinq-Mars' 2014-15 report said that Green Fund spending lacked project criteria, calls for proposals, clearly defined objectives and program information. “When the departments choose projects without launching a call for proposals beforehand or without considering other recipients, there is a risk of inequity. In addition, the lack of specific assessment criteria does not make it possible to ensure that the best projects are selected,” said the commissioner. For those who are interested, you can go to his report, page 19.

A recent submission from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce also expresses concerns about the lack of detail about how and where the provincial government intends to spend cap-and-trade revenue. They say that “there remain outstanding details, including how the remaining revenue will be used and how the allocation of revenue will be administered. These questions must be answered quickly to ensure that the programs and policies that will help businesses, households and others adjust to cap-and-trade are available when the system launches.”

1740

They go on to say, “Cap-and-trade proceeds should not be directed into general government revenue. It is

important that the allocation of the revenue be objective and transparent. To increase transparency, the government should consider the creation of an arm's-length organization to administer this revenue.

"In addition, the government needs to clearly define the principles that it will adopt when deciding how to invest revenue from the cap-and-trade system."

Speaker, we have lost decades taking action on this issue—literally decades—and the consequences could be very stark, and they could appear very soon in our lives. Fifteen, 20 years ago, people thought this was a problem our grandchildren would deal with—bad as that would be, disturbing as that is. But that timeline has changed. Things are happening much faster and much more profoundly than we thought five years ago or 10 years ago.

So it is critical that climate legislation that comes before us actually is successful; that it is fair so that there is buy-in; that it is effective so it will make the change and the difference that we need; that it is transparent so that people feel that it is credible.

We have a very small window to get it right—very small. Speaker, it is important for the government to actually listen to the criticisms and commentary and suggestions levelled from all sides in this Legislature; listen carefully when we go to committee for commentary and amend the bill so that it is overtly—strongly—fair, effective and transparent.

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

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted for this opportunity to get up and give comment to the member from Toronto–Danforth's speech. As the environmental critic for the third party, we know him to be very passionate, very well informed and very thoughtful in his analysis of the issues before us, and I appreciate it very much. I've had the pleasure to meet the member on the doorstep, as he had been representing me for many, many years as I lived in Toronto–Danforth. I feel some sense of regret that I have moved out of the riding and am now in my own riding. I can only hope that the MPP who represents the area I now live in is as effective a representative as the one in Toronto–Danforth.

Speaker, the member talked about the three principles: effective, fair and transparent. I'm delighted for the general support of the party and the member for this piece of legislation, and I'm delighted that he's identified those three critical components, because I believe those exist in this bill.

Certainly, the effectiveness piece: He talked at length about the BC plan, which is really more of a tax and dividend. You don't get, out of tax and dividend, the kinds of carbon reductions that we can expect out of a cap-and-trade program that's rigorously enforced. So we know that we'll be effective in getting the kinds of reductions that are necessary to meet our megatonne reduction targets, and I'm looking forward to it.

Fair: I get the point about the proportionate impact on low-income people, and it's a concern to all of us.

Proportionate, however—the higher-income families will be spending a lot more and will be contributing a lot more through the increased costs. And there are measures being put in place in order to assist low-income people, through, for instance, the \$100 million announced for retrofit programs, which will allow them to replace windows, weather stripping, new furnaces and water heaters. That will help reduce expenditures on energy and help them meet their targets.

Certainly, transparent: We know this is a transparent bill—

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm very pleased to have spent the last hour listening to the hour leadoff of the environmental critic for the third party. The member from Toronto–Danforth has done a good job. Like he mentioned the other day, while we may not always agree on everything, I find the member's thoughts very provocative, and I respect his position and his passion.

Where we do agree is that whatever we do in Ontario—because climate change is, indeed, a very serious issue—the greenhouse gas reduction initiatives have to have a real, tangible impact. When I had my hour leadoff, I spoke about some of the very things we heard the member speak of. We need efficiencies, we need innovation and we need conservation, things that we have not seen this government move on for over a decade.

For goodness' sake, we need to always be mindful that whatever path we choose is indeed fair. It needs to be fair to the Ontario taxpayer, but it also needs to be fair to Ontario manufacturers and businesses. We worry about the leakage and how the tax-and-trade scheme that's coming down the pipeline from this Liberal Party will scare off people looking to invest in Ontario.

We again come back to the principle that, whatever we do here in Ontario to tackle climate change, we need to stand tall, and we need to encourage innovation. All the while, we need to be mindful of what the taxpayer can bear.

We need a credible plan, and we have not seen it from this particular governing party. Bill 172 has a lot of problems that we'll be addressing in further debate.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: Our critic gave an amazing overview of how we feel about this piece of legislation. We've been consistent in our support of cap-and-trade as a rule, but he highlighted some of the gaps and the weaknesses in Bill 172.

For me, the biggest takeaway is that any plan coming forward has to have some credibility, and the credibility will ensure that you get buy-in into the plan. But even today, the Financial Accountability Officer confirmed what the critic has said. He questioned whether any funding "will be directly tied to new program spending" or will be used for existing commitments.

This is a slippery slope. You can't blame us for having a breach of confidence, if you will. This government does

not have the best record on spending money on things they said that they were going to spend money on.

The fairness piece is very real. It's very real for the people of this province. Is it fair to ask northerners to pay the same price as those of us who do have some transit options? Northerners don't have a train; you took it away. Northerners don't even have reliable bus service; you compromised that as well. So there are great inconsistencies in this plan, and the disparity in the rolling out of this strategy already has been very inconsistent.

We do have some concerns around fairness, around transparency, as the Financial Accountability Officer already confirmed today, and to ensure that it will be effective.

You already tried it in 2009. He quoted Mr. Gerretsen, who said that your plan was going to be bold. There wasn't anything bold about that plan. That plan was to make a plan to make another plan.

We need action, and it needs to serve the needs of this province. The critic did a wonderful job of bringing that to light.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was glad the member took such a thoughtful approach in his almost 60-minute oration in the House today. It's obvious that the NDP at least agrees that climate change is a problem and that the proposal by the government merits a lot of favourable consideration. He had some good suggestions.

I was particularly pleased that he was not influenced by the \$10,000-a-plate dinner that was held at the Royal York hotel. There's always a worry about that, because they brought in Rachel Notley, and that brought in, Mr. Speaker—I'll tell you how this works in. That brought in—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the deputy House leader to stick to the debate that's in front of us.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was afraid that the oil barons from Alberta were going to influence the NDP policy, because it was \$10,000 a plate.

But it did not influence the member, the environment critic. I can see that, and I'm very pleased it did not. But you can understand my concern when I saw that we had a Premier from another province coming in here as the bait, and then all the oil barons showed up at the Royal York with their Stetsons on and were shelling out \$10,000.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister of Agriculture, if you're going to heckle, you have to go to your seat.

Hon. James J. Bradley: The reason I mention that, which may appear to be a little off topic, is because the leader of the NDP, just a little while ago, was talking about Liberal friends on Bay Street. I'm wondering how many of those people from Bay Street—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Deputy House leader, please, please. I'd like you to stick to the previous person's debate.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm doing my best. I'll conclude this way: Despite all that, I thought the member had a very thoughtful and reasoned speech this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Toronto–Danforth, you have two minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I thank you, Speaker. You're very kind to give me two.

I want to thank the member from Huron–Bruce for her comments, my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo and the deputy House leader for his always creative meanderings when he gets up to speak. I know he's committed to this issue, and I know he'll go back to caucus and fight very hard for my private member's bill to stop fracking in Ontario. I'm sure that he and others will be able to resist the pressures of gas and oil companies to actually take action on climate change. I'm very hopeful that the deputy House leader will actually go and do those things.

The member for Beaches–East York spoke as well. I have to say to the member that he should have listened more closely to what I said, because I felt the bill, as written, was not fair, transparent or effective, that it needed substantial revision, and that \$100 million that was allocated for home retrofits through Union Gas and Enbridge Gas is not necessarily targeted to low-income households. It doesn't deal with people who have oil heat. It doesn't deal with a whole bunch of people out there who—

Mr. John Vanthof: Or wood heat.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: —or wood heat—a whole bunch of people out there who are tenants, who will not be able to get that assistance, but whose landlords will be able to crank up the bills when they see higher energy costs.

I think that member and the government need to think very seriously about changes that are required that will allow this bill to move forward and do what's needed in terms of greenhouse gas reductions, but also develop the credibility and social licence that will be necessary for it to be accepted and for it to go forward.

Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to address the House.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Seeing the time of day, this House stands adjourned until next Monday morning at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1753.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
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French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
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Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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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
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Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associé des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
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McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
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Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
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Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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Jagmeet Singh, Peter Tabuns
Glenn Thibeault
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

Continued from back cover

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder), 2016, Bill 163, Mr. Flynn / Loi de 2016 d'appui aux premiers intervenants de l'Ontario (état de stress post-traumatique), projet de loi 163, M. Flynn	
Second reading agreed to	7809

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Peter Tabuns	7809
------------------------	------

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Bert Reitsma	
Mr. Jack MacLaren	7809
Gasoline prices	
Mr. Gilles Bisson	7809
Nexxice synchronized skating teams	
Ms. Eleanor McMahon	7810
Complex regional pain syndrome	
Mrs. Julia Munro	7810
Hydro One	
Ms. Jennifer K. French	7810
Business achievement awards	
Mr. Lou Rinaldi	7810
Réseau des femmes parlementaires	
Mme Gila Martow	7811
Tamara Jaworska	
Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn	7811
Refugee hub	
Mr. Arthur Potts	7811

MOTIONS

Order of business	
Hon. James J. Bradley	7812
Motion agreed to	7812

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Canadian Agricultural Literacy Week	
Hon. Jeff Leal	7812
Mr. Toby Barrett	7813
Mr. John Vanthof	7813

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Health care funding	
Mrs. Gila Martow	7814
Rural schools	
Mr. Percy Hatfield	7814
Home inspection industry	
Mrs. Kathryn McGarry	7815
Health care funding	
Mr. Lorne Coe	7815
Long-term care	
Mr. Michael Mantha	7815
Lung health	
Mrs. Cristina Martins	7815
Ontario Drug Benefit Program	
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	7816
Privatization of public assets	
Ms. Peggy Sattler	7816
Lung health	
Mrs. Kathryn McGarry	7816
Health care funding	
Mr. Ted Arnott	7816
Éducation postsecondaire en français	
Mme France Gélinas	7817
Lung health	
Mrs. Kathryn McGarry	7817
PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS / AFFAIRES D'INTÉRÊT PUBLIC ÉMANANT DES DÉPUTÉS	
Rare diseases	
Mr. Michael Harris	7817
Mme France Gélinas	7820
Ms. Eleanor McMahon	7820
Mr. Jeff Yurek	7821
Mr. Michael Mantha	7822
Mr. John Fraser	7823
Mr. Steve Clark	7824
Mr. Bill Walker	7824
Mr. Michael Harris	7825
Licensed Home Inspectors Act, 2016, Bill 165, Mr. Dong / Loi de 2016 sur les inspecteurs d'habitations titulaires d'un permis, projet de loi 165, M. Dong	
Mr. Han Dong	7826
Mr. Jim McDonell	7827
Mr. Percy Hatfield	7827
Ms. Sophie Kiwala	7828
Mr. Lorne Coe	7829
Mr. Gilles Bisson	7829
Mr. Chris Ballard	7830

Mrs. Julia Munro.....	7831
Mr. John Vanthof.....	7831
Mr. Arthur Potts.....	7831
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson.....	7832
Mr. Han Dong.....	7832
Transparency and Accountability in Government Contracting Act, 2016, Bill 167, Ms. Fife / Loi de 2016 sur la transparence et la responsabilisation en matière de marchés publics, projet de loi 167, Mme Fife	
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	7833
Hon. Dipika Damerla.....	7835
Mr. Randy Pettapiece.....	7836
Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	7836
Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn.....	7837
Mr. Lorne Coe.....	7838
Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	7839
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	7839
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	7839
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	7840
Rare diseases	
The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon).....	7840
Licensed Home Inspectors Act, 2016, Bill 165, Mr. Dong / Loi de 2016 sur les inspecteurs d'habitations titulaires d'un permis, projet de loi 165, M. Dong	
Second reading agreed to.....	7841
Transparency and Accountability in Government Contracting Act, 2016, Bill 167, Ms. Fife / Loi de 2016 sur la transparence et la responsabilisation en	

matière de marchés publics, projet de loi 167, Mme Fife	
The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon).....	7841
Rare diseases	
Motion negatived.....	7841
Transparency and Accountability in Government Contracting Act, 2016, Bill 167, Ms. Fife / Loi de 2016 sur la transparence et la responsabilisation en matière de marchés publics, projet de loi 167, Mme Fife	
Second reading agreed to.....	7842

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly	
The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon).....	7842
Motion agreed to.....	7842
Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act, 2016, Bill 172, Mr. Murray / Loi de 2016 sur l'atténuation du changement climatique et une économie sobre en carbone, projet de loi 172, M. Murray	
Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	7842
Mr. Arthur Potts.....	7850
Ms. Lisa M. Thompson.....	7850
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	7850
Hon. James J. Bradley.....	7851
Mr. Peter Tabuns.....	7851
Second reading debate deemed adjourned.....	7851

CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Thursday 3 March 2016 / Jeudi 3 mars 2016

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Supporting Ontario's First Responders Act (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder), 2016, Bill 163, Mr. Flynn / Loi de 2016 d'appui aux premiers intervenants de l'Ontario (état de stress post-traumatique), projet de loi 163, M. Flynn	
Second reading vote deferred.....	7789
2016 Ontario budget / Budget de l'Ontario de 2016	
Mr. Patrick Brown.....	7789
Mr. Steve Clark.....	7793
Debate adjourned.....	7797

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mrs. Gila Martow.....	7797
M. Gilles Bisson.....	7797
Hon. Helena Jaczek.....	7797
Mr. Jeff Yurek.....	7797
Mr. Han Dong.....	7797
Mr. John Yakabuski.....	7797
M. Michael Mantha.....	7797
M. Grant Crack.....	7797
Ms. Laurie Scott.....	7797
Mr. Randy Pettapiece.....	7797
M. Michael Mantha.....	7797
Mme Marie-France Lalonde.....	7797
Mr. Robert Bailey.....	7797
Mme France Gélinas.....	7797
Hon. Eric Hoskins.....	7798
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	7798
Ms. Daiene Vernile.....	7798
Mr. Michael Harris.....	7798
Mme Sophie Kiwala.....	7798
M. Lorne Coe.....	7798
Mrs. Julia Munro.....	7798
Mr. Bob Delaney.....	7798
Ms. Peggy Sattler.....	7798
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac).....	7798

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Ontario budget	
Mr. Patrick Brown.....	7798
Hon. Deborah Matthews.....	7798

Rare diseases

Mr. Patrick Brown.....	7799
Hon. Eric Hoskins.....	7799
Mr. Michael Harris.....	7799

Health care funding

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	7800
Hon. Eric Hoskins.....	7800

Health care funding

Ms. Andrea Horwath.....	7801
Hon. Eric Hoskins.....	7801

Ontario budget

Mr. Victor Fedeli.....	7802
Hon. Charles Sousa.....	7802

Ontario Drug Benefit Program

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	7803
Hon. Mario Sergio.....	7803

Rural infrastructure

Mr. Lou Rinaldi.....	7803
Hon. Jeff Leal.....	7803

Assistive devices

Mr. Bill Walker.....	7804
Hon. Eric Hoskins.....	7804

School closures

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky.....	7805
Hon. Liz Sandals.....	7805

Transportation infrastructure

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn.....	7805
Hon. Steven Del Duca.....	7805

Accessible parking permits

Mrs. Gila Martow.....	7806
Hon. David Oraziatti.....	7806

L'Université de l'Ontario français

Mme France Gélinas.....	7806
Hon. Reza Moridi.....	7807
L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur.....	7807

Mining industry

Mr. Han Dong.....	7807
Hon. Michael Gravelle.....	7807

School closures

Mr. Todd Smith.....	7808
Hon. Liz Sandals.....	7808

Visitors

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong.....	7808
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Continued on inside back cover