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Lundi 3 octobre 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 3 October 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 3 octobre 2016

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's a great pleasure to introduce two guests from my riding who are here to spend the day with their favourite MPP—me: Steve and his daughter Sabrina. Welcome to Queen's Park. Looking forward to the day.

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

The government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, and good morning to you. I hope everyone had a good weekend.

It's my great pleasure to welcome some guests who are here today as part of the architecture day at Queen's Park. Please welcome the president of the Ontario Association of Architects, Toon Dreesen, as well as the executive director, Kristi Doyle, who are in the members' gallery.

We also have a number of representatives from the local architectural societies and architects from throughout the province. Please give them a big round of applause and welcome them to Queen's Park.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's my pleasure to rise and to recognize today's page captain, Ryan Betts, from my riding of Scarborough—Guildwood. Today in the gallery, we have his parents, Kathleen and Mike Betts; grandmother Jennifer Sloan; grandmother Diane Betts; grandfather Peter Wilson; and a guest visiting from England, Margaret Banks. Please welcome them.

Ms. Soo Wong: I too want to welcome my friend and colleague Diane Betts to Queen's Park. I know she's not a stranger to Queen's Park, but welcome again. Welcome to both of you.

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, I would like to recognize the students from St. Joseph's Morrow Park Secondary School in Willowdale. They're having a tour today and watching question period along with one of their teachers. Welcome to the Legislature.

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

TIME ALLOCATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker, for that helpful reminder.

I believe you'll find we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding Bill 13, An Act in respect of the cost of electricity.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that the order of the House dated Wednesday, September 28, 2016, be amended as follows:

—That in the fourth paragraph, the words “4 p.m. on Thursday, October 6, 2016” be struck out and replaced with “12 noon on Tuesday, October 11, 2016”; and

—That in the fifth paragraph, the words “Wednesday, October 12, 2016, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.” be struck out and replaced with “Monday, October 17, 2016, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.”; and

—That in the sixth paragraph, the words “Wednesday, October 12, 2016, at 1 p.m.” be struck out and replaced with “Monday, October 17, 2016, at 4 p.m.”; and

—That in the seventh paragraph, the words “Monday, October 17, 2016” be struck out and replaced with “Tuesday, October 18, 2016.”

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that an order of the House dated Wednesday, September 28—

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispensed.

We've heard the motion. Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Last call for introduction of guests. Seeing none, it is now time for question period.

Sorry, we do have one at the last moment. The member from Parkdale—High Park.

MEMBER'S BIRTHDAY

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: There's someone sitting next to me, Mr. Tabuns from Toronto—Danforth, who's celebrating a significant birthday today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Now it is time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. According to the independent Auditor General, this Liberal government will overpay \$9.2 billion for renewable energy contracts. It is the same Liberal government that has received \$1.3 million in donations from some 30 renewable energy contracts.

My question is for the Premier. I'm hoping she can be on the record to answer this. Is there any connection between the reckless renewable contracts for hydro we did not need and donations to her Ontario Liberal Party?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: No, there's not. I would ask the member opposite, as he goes on his gambit on clean, renewable energy, which we have put in place in this province—a 90% clean electricity grid—if his thought is that we should reopen the coal plants.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to get both sides' attention. Thank you. Leader?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: The Premier's assertion on coal-fired generation—it was the PCs that initiated that. Her comment is frankly ridiculous. It is a distraction. It is a diversion because the Premier does not want to talk about the donations for the contracts she shouldn't have signed.

So my question is—\$1.3 million to the Ontario Liberal Party from renewable energy companies. Those 30 companies are part of the \$9.2 billion that we overpaid in these contracts, according to the Auditor General. The Auditor General's numbers are bang-on. A reasonable person would conclude: \$1.3 million to the Ontario Liberal Party—a \$9.2 billion taxpayer overpayment because of those same companies.

My question is will the Premier stand here today at Queen's Park and deny those donations had nothing to do with these unacceptable contracts?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I've been very clear that fundraising and policy decisions are separate. All of the parties in this House have held fundraisers over the years. We have all followed the same rules—

Mr. Steve Clark: It's all about the cash, Premier.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and we have now moved to make changes to—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Right after I say "Order, please," you start. That's not very helpful. The member from Leeds–Grenville will stop.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —make changes to those political fundraising rules.

Again, I will say to the Leader of the Opposition: We took a dirty, unreliable electricity system; we have a 90% emissions-free grid. We made changes that led to a renewable industry that's created over 42,000 jobs. I say to the Leader of the Opposition again—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, second time. The member from Chatham–Kent–Essex, come to order. The member from Haldimand–Norfolk, come to order. And if I hear what I hear again, I will ask you to withdraw.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I say to the Leader of the Opposition again, is his plan to reopen the coal plants, Mr. Speaker?

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: I guess the \$1.3 million in donations is just a coincidence.

Since I can't get an answer on the donations—I just get diversion tactics—I'm going to ask about something along the same lines on hydro. Hydro Ottawa has asked for a new rate structure.

Interjection.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: The new plan would see a higher delivery fee for families that were under Ottawa's average usage. So if you conserve energy under this Premier's Ontario, you pay more for delivery—paying more to deliver. Yes, that is absurd.

Will the Premier speak out against this plan? Why should people be punished for conserving energy? How does this make sense? How does this Liberal government condone this?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I will say to the Leader of the Opposition that I assume he's talking about an application to the Ontario Energy Board, where those decisions are made. I'm not going to pre-empt the conversation that happens at the OEB. We know, Mr. Speaker, that the OEB has accepted applications for increases and has rejected applications for increases, so we'll let that unfold.

Our job is to make sure we have a clean electricity system, to make sure that we put in place programs to support people so that they can pay their bills when there are exorbitant charges and to make sure that we do everything in our power to continue to support people across the province. That's our role. That's what we're doing, Mr. Speaker.

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Premier. This morning, the leader of the official opposition is headed to Yes I Can Nursery School. I know the Premier knows Yes I Can Nursery School well because it's in her riding of Don Valley West.

The Premier was a good friend of Yes I Can and she actually helped the nursery get funding for many years. It started as a pilot project and then moved to year-to-year funding, all along indicating that sustainable funding was on its way. But the support disappeared, and this Liberal government has turned their back on Yes I Can Nursery School.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain why the Liberals turned their back on Yes I Can? If she answers quickly enough, maybe the Leader of the Opposition can give them an answer when he visits today.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First of all, Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I have been to Yes I Can many times and I have worked with the nursery school to help them to access funding. In fact, every year we provide funding to the city of Toronto, who then funds Yes I Can to the tune of \$300,000 a year. So there is provincial money that goes into Yes I Can.

Our intention always with Yes I Can, from the time I was Minister of Education, was to help them to establish a working relationship with the city of Toronto so that they could work with the city because that's the primary relationship. That's how other nursery schools function, and it was always our intention that that would be the relationship.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: I guess it begs the question, what happened? The Premier used to regularly visit Yes I Can, where she worked closely with the executive director there, Janet MacDougall.

At the June 2011 graduation, she actually stood up—the Premier did—at Yes I Can and she said, “Yes I Can Nursery School should be the model of early childhood education in the province of Ontario, and we should fund it.” But now, the Minister of Education staff won't even return a call.

Mr. Speaker, if the Premier believes that the program should be funded, then why did it take a visit from the leader of the official opposition today for Yes I Can to finally get an email returned? That's what has happened: “Mr. Brown is on his way there now,” and all of a sudden, we get an email returned.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have worked with this nursery school and dozens of organizations in my riding over the years. My hope was always that Yes I Can would work with the city of Toronto and would be in a relationship with the city of Toronto that would allow them to access ongoing funding.

It was never the intention that there would be direct funding from the Ministry of Education. I can tell you, I was the minister at the time. I was working with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services at the time, and that was never the intention.

We're still trying to get Yes I Can to work with the city of Toronto to find a way so that, on top of the \$300,000 which they already get funding for, they would work with the city of Toronto and establish a relationship that would allow for that funding. That was always the intention, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: Perhaps the Premier was just going around everywhere making promises that she can't keep.

The one thing is—

Interjections.

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

Finish, please.

Mr. Todd Smith: There are available child care spaces in Toronto and Yes I Can is one of the nursery schools that has space. But Mr. Speaker, they don't have the funds to support these children. In fact, they're actually turning away three kids a week. Yes I Can has the space but not the funding.

I read what the Premier said when she was there in 2011. She said the funding would be on the way. The years of Liberal scandal, waste and mismanagement have pushed aside important programs like Yes I Can right here in her own riding.

Mr. Speaker, why should a program like Yes I Can be forced to turn away deserving children who need a space?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think that it is a good idea that we look at what is actually happening in child care in this province. We are moving to create 100,000 new child care spaces. We're working with the sector.

We're making a \$500-million investment in autism, because the thing about Yes I Can is that it's a blended program. There is an autism component to it and there is a nursery school component to it. As the member opposite notes, I've said it's a very good model. I think it's a very good model. I think that it's something that should be looked at by other nursery schools across the province.

But the reality is that all of those nursery schools need to work with the municipalities. They need to have a relationship with the municipality. That's how it works. We've been trying to get Yes I Can into that relationship so that they could have that sustainable funding. I still hope that will happen, Mr. Speaker.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Last week, I was in Niagara Falls where I met a couple named Laura and Fran. They were in their house. They had invited me to come and speak to them about their hydro bill. Laura and Fran have seen their hydro bill increase over the last two years by more than \$300. But as it happened, I arrived at their home at the very same time as the mail carrier, who happened to have their new hydro bill with him at the time. The bill was more than \$600—

Interjections.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: And as much as the government wants to jeer, the fact of the matter is that that put

Laura into tears that morning because they were already struggling to be able to make their bills.

Laura and Fran can't afford a privatized hydro system where the bills keep going up. Hydro costs are going up because of the privatization of Hydro One and everyone knows it. Will this Liberal government stop any further privatization of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: On this side of the House we are very concerned that people have the support to be able to pay for the things in their lives that they need and that are necessary to their quality of life, obviously including electricity.

1050

That's exactly why we put in place the Ontario Electricity Support Program. It's exactly why we took the debt retirement charge off people's bills and it's why we're doing more. It's why we're taking the provincial portion of the HST off of people's bills, which I would remind the leader of the third party is something that she thought was a good idea. Along with other people around the province, she thought that was a good idea. We are doing that. We are also increasing support for people in rural communities.

Mr. Speaker, we're acutely aware of needing to support people in their lives every single day, and that's why we've put these programs in place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, later that day, I was in Hamilton and I met a woman named Hannah. Hannah is a single mom. She's got two kids and, like every other mom, she wants her kids to have every opportunity.

A few years ago her hydro bill was around a hundred bucks. Her last bill was \$324. Her bills are so high that this single mom has had to stop putting money into her sons' RESPs. That means a tougher future for her sons.

Hannah and her sons can't afford privatization and higher bills. Will this Premier stop the privatization of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the leader of the third party wants to make this false connection that she continues to make about Hydro One, and the changes that we've made at Hydro One, and electricity prices. The reality is that we have made significant investments in our electricity system. We inherited a dirty, unreliable system. We have built more than 10,000 kilometres of transmission line. We have moved to a renewable system, a 90% emissions-free electricity grid—all things that I would have thought the NDP would have supported.

At the same time, we know we need to invest in infrastructure. We need to invest in transportation infrastructure. That's what the expansion of the ownership of Hydro One is about, not the linkage that the leader of the third party is making.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The reality is that consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have been

privatizing our electricity system, and that's why the rates are out of control. That's the reality.

The next day, I met another woman named Kristin. She was in Kitchener. She had just finished university. She's got two kids and she's paying \$1,300 a month for child care. She has \$40,000 in student loans. Her most recent hydro bill was three times higher than at the same time as last year. She doesn't know what to do. The government isn't making child care any more affordable, but they're profiting off of her student loans, and they're planning to privatize even more of Hydro One.

Kristin and her husband are on the edge. Like 80% of Ontarians, they don't want hydro to be sold off. They want to give their kids a great life, but it's getting harder and harder, not easier. Will this Premier stop any further sell-off of Hydro One?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I actually don't know where it's coming from, but I have been hearing some whistling and it will stop. It's not appropriate in the House.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have an enormous amount of sympathy for the people that the leader of the third party, Kristin and Hannah and Fran—I think I've missed a name, but I have enormous sympathy for them.

I hope that the leader of the third party, in her conversations with them, talked about the programs that are in place. I hope she talked about the Ontario Electricity Support Program. I hope she talked about the Ontario Energy and Property Tax Credit. I hope she let people know—

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I hope she let them know that there were options.

Also, the leader of the third party has mentioned post-secondary education a couple of times in terms of costs. We are moving to make tuition free for low- and lower-middle-income families. I appreciate that the leader of the third party doesn't want to acknowledge that, but that is just one of the things that we're doing to help people in their lives every single day.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, my next question is also for the Premier. The 2015 budget created a brand new tax giveaway to encourage cities to sell their local hydro utilities, and there could be more handouts coming. To quote one media report last week: "Premier Kathleen Wynne's government will be all ears if Mayor John Tory asks for tax concessions to expedite the sale of Toronto Hydro." To quote another: "The province believes that privatizing Toronto Hydro ... is a good idea and Queen's Park is interested in helping make it happen."

Now, I think Ontarians deserve to know whether these media reports are in fact true. Is this Premier going to

give new tax breaks for the privatization of hydro utilities while, at the same time, families continue to pay more and more every day?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Finance is going to want to speak to the tax issue.

What I will say, as I've said before, is that it is entirely up to the city of Toronto, their council and their mayor to decide what they want to do with Toronto Hydro. That is where the decision lies. It is up to them to have the discussion. It is up to them to make a decision, and then to move forward. It is not up to us at the provincial level to make that decision; it is up to the city council.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Everybody knows that this Premier is primed to sweeten the pot for the local utilities to be sold off, and that's the matter I am trying to get at in this question.

The Liberal government is already encouraging the privatization of local utilities like Toronto Hydro through major tax giveaways that they have already announced. Liberal insiders are suggesting that the Premier wants to sweeten the pot, sweeten the deal even more to further facilitate the sell-off of these local distribution companies.

People in Ontario cannot afford any more privatization in our electricity system. Will this Premier stop pushing the privatization of local distribution companies?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Ultimately, as mentioned already by the Premier, the decision is up to the mayor and the council of the city of Toronto, as it was for the city of Hamilton when Horizon and other LDCs decided to merge. In fact, they're in the midst right now of looking at Brampton hydro to enable greater cost savings and enable better delivery for their consumers. Consequently, Toronto Hydro is making their decisions, not the province of Ontario.

We have of course indicated that transfer tax reductions occurred in the last budget, from 33% to 22%, but Toronto will have to pay that tax, as will any other municipality, should they decide to go to a private investor. Should they decide to merge with other municipalities, they'll get the benefits thereof, as did Hamilton. All we want to make certain is that the consumers of this province have the best delivery of service by their hydro-electric service.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: How a finance minister can imagine that putting private profits ahead of decent rates is going to benefit the public is beyond me, Speaker, because that's what privatization does: It puts the profits into the pockets of the shareholders instead of into the interests of the people.

People are having a hard time making ends meet. Laura, Fran, Hannah and Kristin are all barely hanging on. Something has to change, and it has to change now. Ontarians cannot afford a privatized Hydro One and they

certainly can't afford a local hydro utility to become a private for-profit company.

The Premier would like us to believe she's just an innocent bystander in all this, but she's actually making things worse with her tax giveaways. So will this Premier commit to stopping any further sell-off of Hydro One and to not incentivize any sell-off of local distribution companies?

Hon. Charles Sousa: There are a number of things the member opposite has mentioned.

One, we are not encouraging any other municipality to privatize. We are encouraging LDCs to find savings. If they merge or if they decide to do other things, they'll have to pay their taxes accordingly.

Furthermore, the member opposite doesn't talk about the benefits of broadening its ownership so that we can reinvest in the things that matter—in Hamilton, for example, with the LRT and other investments that are going to create even greater value in return.

Of course, the province of Ontario will be the major holder of Hydro One. We will not allow any more than 10% from any other investor, again, to safeguard some of those conditions.

The member opposite makes reference to a number of other programs that she's obviously not telling her constituents are available to them to further alleviate some of those cost pressures for their benefit. I hope the member opposite does explain to her constituents those benefits. If she's not, then she's not doing her job.

TABLING OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the President of the Treasury Board.

Last week, you informed the House that the public accounts would be delayed. They were not tabled on September 30 as they were supposed to be. I understand that the Liberal government is challenging the Auditor General's accounting methods.

A Liberal told us last Friday that the Treasury Board has proposed to hire outside consultants to review the books, and the Liberals want their results to stand. To me, it simply sounds like the Liberals are once again questioning the credibility of the Auditor General.

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Mr. Speaker, how many accounting firms is the Liberal government prepared to hire during this dispute with the Auditor General, and how much money is this expected to cost with all of these extra consultants?

Hon. Liz Sandals: As you know, Speaker, I did announce to the House last week that we would be delayed in tabling the public accounts this year, which are actually due on the 27th, 180 days after the end of the last fiscal year. Clearly, we have not met that target.

We are continuing to work with the Auditor General to finalize the statements. In fact, Minister Sousa and I did meet with the Auditor General. There is one rather complex accounting issue that remains outstanding. We are working to resolve that with the Auditor General.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I guess the question remains: What is the Liberal government hiding in these public accounts, and how many consultants are they prepared to hire and at what cost in order to undermine the credibility of the Auditor General?

On Friday, three senior Treasury Board bureaucrats accused the Auditor General of being politically motivated. They said that they have been doing this the same way for 13 years and she's trying to change it.

My question, Mr. Speaker: Were these senior bureaucrats speaking on behalf of the Treasury Board, and does the Treasury Board minister actually hold their point of view?

Hon. Liz Sandals: What I can tell you, and what I told you last week, is that there is absolutely nothing to hide. In fact, what I can tell you is that not only will we meet this year's deficit target; we'll exceed this year's deficit target. So I'm actually very pleased.

In fact, I'm anxious to get the public accounts into the public venue because I don't want the public to be concerned that there is some sort of a mystery here. We want to share the good news of our accounting because it actually means that we're on track not just to meet this year's deficit targets, but to balance our budget next year.

MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Thousands of people rallied here at Queen's Park over the weekend for decent jobs, for decent futures for their families, for schedules you can plan a life around and for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, thousands like Erendira Bravo, who works in construction as a contract worker when she really should be a full-time employee; thousands who want to be able to afford their bills and pay their rent, who want to put food on the table and maybe even plan for their future.

Speaker, will the Premier act on the evidence, follow the lead of Alberta and elsewhere and increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Minister of Children and Youth Services, come to order, please.

Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

Speaker, I was aware of the people that came down to Queen's Park over the weekend. They're asking for us to take another look at the changing workplaces and what's happening out there in the world of work. We know that the nature of the work in the province of Ontario is changing. It's changed since the Employment Standards Act and the Labour Relations Act were last looked at in the 1990s and 2000s.

That's why we've taken the positive step of putting in a Changing Workplaces Review. We've had two advisors

who have been travelling the province now for some time. They've been talking to organized labour. They've been talking to people about the impact that work is having on ordinary people's lives in the province of Ontario. They have an interim report out where they brought back the findings. They brought back some of the options that would deal with those findings. The Changing Workplaces Review is designed to address exactly the issues that the member is talking about.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Over the weekend, thousands of hard-working Ontarians who want to provide futures for their children, yet are finding it harder than ever to get ahead, don't think that a living wage should be impossible. The New Democrats don't think a living wage should be impossible either.

Will the Premier listen to Ontarians, to the workers who gathered here over the weekend, and increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you once again to the member for that question.

Speaker, if you go back and remember, between 1996 and 2000, this province had one of the lowest minimum wages in the country. It was frozen for that entire period of time. It was frozen at \$6.85. We knew we could do better, and what we wanted to do was put a process in place that allowed for regular increases to the minimum wage. For the last few years, we've been leading the country when it comes to the provinces and the minimum wage; Alberta has moved ahead a little bit at this point in time.

What we have is stability. We've got predictability. What we'll be doing in 2019 is reviewing the minimum wage again. It's got a five-year review. People in this province can rely on regular increases that are based on CPI. That's something neither party was able to do in the past.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Han Dong: My question is to the Minister of Economic Development and Growth. Innovation is incredibly important to the future of Ontario's economy. We are making investments for our future. Just two weeks ago, in my riding of Trinity-Spadina, IBM officially opened an innovation hub to give some of the best start-up companies access to super-computing technology to help them scale up. I understand the Ontario government is a partner in this new venture.

I have heard from many constituents about the importance of innovation activities and investments in order to help our businesses in Ontario propel into the global marketplace. Minister, can you please tell us more about the IBM innovation hub and what our government is doing to help businesses stay competitive and innovative in this global economy?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for Trinity-Spadina for that question and for joining me a couple of weeks ago at that very important launch.

The fact is that we're very committed to homegrown innovation. That's why we invested \$22.75 million from our Jobs and Prosperity Fund to help the IBM innovation hub get going.

There's a reason we invest in companies that drive disruptive technologies. I was at that launch together with the member a couple of weeks ago. Dino Trevisani, the president of IBM Canada, said this, and I thought it was a really important thing to say: Our job is to support businesses that "out-think the limit of possibilities."

I couldn't agree more, and that's why this government continues to invest in disruptive technology and continues to ensure that our smaller companies have the capability of scaling up. This new hub is an exciting new hub that's going to help us do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Minister. This is wonderful news and it shows that Ontario is definitely focusing on helping businesses become a part of the fiercely competitive global race. I know IBM could have gone to other jurisdictions, but it chose to be in Ontario to take advantage of our positive business climate and our talented people.

Investments like these mean a lot to many start-ups and entrepreneurs in my riding, as well as others across the province. Can you please tell us more about this innovation hub, specifically how it will support these start-ups of businesses and entrepreneurs in my riding?

Hon. Brad Duguid: Here in Ontario, we're second in North America, to California, when it comes to ICT companies. That's a really important place to be. That didn't happen by accident; that's a result of the investments we've made in our education system. It's part of the investments we've made in nurturing our talent.

The IBM innovation hub is one example that really demonstrates our commitment to innovation, to creating jobs and building a strong economy. This help will provide entrepreneurs and start-ups with the support and the advanced technologies they need to scale up and compete globally, which is so important. It will help them rapidly move their business plans from research to commercialization, and provide the expertise and mentoring they need to compete on a global scale.

This new investment in the IBM innovation hub helps to ensure that Ontario is at the forefront in leading technological disruption and innovation. We're really proud that companies like IBM are making these investments in this province and of what we're creating in terms of building that new economy.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Jim McDonell: To the Minister of Education: Last week, communities across eastern Ontario were shocked to learn that their community rural schools might close, after forming an integral part of community life for generations.

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Although the board has scheduled community consultation sessions on the issue, the government cut the

consultation period and removed consideration for the value of schools to the community and the local economy for the pupil accommodation review guidelines. Families are left feeling their opinions won't matter.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier challenges her agri-food industry to grow the over \$30 billion it contributes to the Ontario economy. So why is the minister ignoring the basis of rural economic development?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member opposite for this very important question. Mr. Speaker, we know that decisions around school closures are some of the hardest decisions that our local school boards have to make. This is why our government requires school boards to consult with communities, to consult with parents, to consult with those who are directly impacted by this very difficult decision.

This is not just about school buildings. This is about ensuring that we have enough students in schools, so that boards can make a decision about what is in the best interests of students' learning and the programming options that are available to students in the best possible facility.

We have helped school boards to pursue these kinds of projects through a \$750-million school consolidation fund. We know that these are difficult decisions for boards, and that's why we're supporting them with an appropriate process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Speaker, back to the minister: This is hardly the first time the government has deprived communities of a meaningful say in decisions affecting their future. The Green Energy Act took away their right to prevent industrial wind farms and solar development if they are an unwilling host. Just over two years ago, they closed the Kemptville agricultural college without local consultation. It is a trend where cabinet thinks it knows better.

Ontarians deserve not only to have a say, but to be heard and listened to when it comes to their future. Rural communities rely on local schooling in order to thrive. Pupils spend less time on buses and can maximize their learning, extracurricular and family time. Clearly, local schools are of value to the community and support local jobs.

Will this minister commit to ensuring that this government finally listens to the economic and community needs of rural Ontario?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, our government has clearly shown that it's committed to ensuring that students in rural schools have an equal opportunity to excel at schools. Not only are we providing additional funding to reflect the issues that are impacting our rural communities, but we're also in fact providing support for community hubs, because that's an opportunity for school space that is available to be used more broadly for needs in the community that have been identified. We have provided the additional supports that school boards need in order to do so. Unlike the party opposite when they were in power: They actually cut and consolidated

without consultation and without input from the communities.

We're not taking any lessons from the opposition. We're working together to ensure that our schools have the supports that they need to provide the best possible learning environment for all of our students here in Ontario.

ASSISTANCE TO FLOOD VICTIMS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question is for the Premier. Good morning, Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Good morning, Percy.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: As you know, the mayors of Windsor and Tecumseh declared a state of emergency last Thursday. More than an average month of rain fell in less than five hours. We had two months of rain in 15 hours. The storm water system didn't fail, but it was overwhelmed by the amount of water in such a short period of time. Thousands of homes had flooded basements.

Speaker, will the Premier commit to providing provincial funding to assist some of homeowners hardest hit with flood damage and with little or no insurance?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say, I know that all of us in the Legislature were thinking about the people in Windsor over the weekend, and I made sure that our minister was going there. He's on-site today, Mr. Speaker, to have a tour and to see what has happened. It's a terrible situation and I know people will be very worried.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the member opposite knows that there are programs in place. We've worked to make those programs more responsive to people on the ground. One of the concerns that I have had is that often the money doesn't flow in a timely way. The minister is there, he's working with the mayors and we are right there to support the residents. There always are assessments that have to happen in terms of the municipal infrastructure and the private damage, so that's the conversation that the minister is having with the mayors today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, some of the homeowners were told by their insurance companies that they now have a cap of \$5,000 on any claims. This news was totally unexpected. They had never been told that before.

As we know, unprecedented storms are causing catastrophic damage across Ontario. Will the Premier do everything in her power to help homeowners and municipal leaders in these situations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, we absolutely will. The member opposite will know that the province does assist with damage to eligible private property. The discussion is just on what's eligible, what's not, what's municipal, what's private. That's the conversation that is happening now. We absolutely will do everything in our power to support people in this time of great need, and we wish them all the very best. It's in these early days

after flooding that there are real emergency needs, and the minister is on the ground to assess those.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: This question is for the Minister of Housing and the minister responsible for the poverty reduction strategy.

Mr. Speaker, stable and affordable housing is one of the most important determinants of a healthy life filled with opportunity. The research is increasingly clear that access to affordable housing is vital to progress across sectors, from health and education to our economy and safe neighbourhoods. It's essential to increase investments in innovations, products and programs that tackle critical housing issues.

Minister, as Ontario continues to grow, we must ensure that all of our communities, including my riding of Barrie, remain affordable and accessible to people of all income levels.

Speaker, would the minister inform the House of what recent investments Ontario is making in affordable housing?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you to the member from Barrie for that question and for her ongoing commitment to helping vulnerable members of society.

Speaker, our government's vision is that every person has an affordable home to provide the foundation to secure employment, raise a family and build strong communities. That's why I was pleased to announce, during the summer, together with my federal counterpart, that more than \$640 million in new funding will be jointly invested by the federal and provincial governments over the next two years to support the housing needs of Ontarians. We've also committed to spending \$168 million in provincial funding to help build, renovate and provide affordable housing across the province.

Through our renewed partnership with the federal government and joint investments in affordable housing across Ontario, we're working to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens are not left behind.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister. I'm glad to hear of the new investments our government is making in affordable housing. It's needed all across this province.

Mr. Speaker, Canada is one of the few developed nations that does not have a national housing strategy. I'm glad to see that the new federal government is working with the provinces and the territories to change this. I know Ontario welcomes our new federal partner and the opportunity to engage in this strategy, as we have long called for. We are pleased to share the same values, have common priorities and agree that all Canadians deserve housing that is safe and affordable.

Speaker, would the minister tell the House how the government is ensuring that Ontario's affordable housing interests will be included in the national housing strategy?

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thanks again to the member for that question.

Mr. Speaker, over the summer session, I had the pleasure of meeting with federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers in Victoria to begin work on a national housing strategy. During the meeting, I highlighted Ontario's priorities for a national housing strategy. This government believes that the strategy must address long-term funding, the full continuum of housing and how to align with the goals of Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy update, and it must focus on outcomes for people rather than specific program approaches.

As part of this work, I've also hosted round tables all across Ontario to hear what housing and municipal planners would like to see in a national housing strategy. I look forward to bringing what I've heard from these consultations to the next national meeting in November and continuing to discuss Ontario's priorities.

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WATER EXTRACTION

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Premier. The Premier has given the Minister of the Environment a mandate to "report back in fall 2016 on options to reform the regulatory process for permits to take water for water bottling purposes" and "work with the Minister of Finance on pricing options for water takings for bottled water in Ontario."

Will the Premier inform the House how this will unfold? Will there be public consultations? Will interested groups and individuals be invited to make comments? Will municipalities be included? Will they release the recommendations before the cabinet makes final decisions? How will the minister be able to do all this before December? And does the government plan to use this issue as a cash grab to pay for its out-of-control spending?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is going to want to comment, but I just want to reiterate what I said this morning when I was asked by the media, which is this: I believe that it is very important to have consultations. So on the question of consultations, absolutely, we need to have input from people around the province on our most precious natural resource, which is water.

Because Ontario has such an enormous gift of clean water, we need to be impeccable stewards of that water, so we do need to have a consultation. In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, there are some pressing issues around permits that have been extended, permits that need to be dealt with, and so we need to take some actions in the immediate term. But does there need to be a broader conversation? Absolutely.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: The mayor of the township of Centre Wellington is seeking a meeting with the Minister of the Environment to discuss their current situation regarding the Middlebrook property and Nestlé Waters's interest in it. I hope the Premier will direct the minister to meet with Mayor Kelly Linton.

We continue to maintain that our groundwater is essential to the future of our communities and it must be protected. We need to continue to take a science-based approach to whether or not permits are granted, taking into account the long-term growth plans of communities. Three weeks ago, on September 12, I tabled a private member's resolution stating my position that any increase in provincial taxes or fees for water-bottling companies must be substantially shared with the municipalities in which they're located.

Will the Premier commit to this House that municipalities will receive a fair share of any increases charged to the water-bottling companies?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Wellington-Halton Hills for the supplementary. Particularly with this past summer, with drought conditions experienced by many of our farmers across Ontario, we do know that water is a precious resource and we must balance the needs of all Ontarians, including consumers and farmers, with requests from businesses. Achieving this balance, Mr. Speaker, coupled with taking climate change events into consideration, of course, is this government's goal.

This is an important issue for Ontarians from every part of this province. We want to make sure that we address it by taking a rational, evidence-based approach that responds to community concerns. We are looking at this more closely from a provincial-wide perspective and will be making an announcement soon on next steps. Mr. Speaker, I heard this from many of the participants that were at the International Plowing Match in the county of Wellington a few short weeks ago.

DISASTER RELIEF

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour la première ministre. I wish to inform the Premier that the good people of Gogama and Mattagami First Nation have reached a tipping point. On Monday, October 10, they will be holding a protest on Highway 144. That's the road between Sudbury and Timmins.

Why, Speaker? Well, because this government won't order CN to clean up the mess, to clean up the oil out of the Makami River from the train derailment. On Monday, Highway 144 will be a busy road, with the usual truck traffic and people coming back home or from school after celebrating Thanksgiving. And it is hunting season, after all, so add to this hundreds of hunters.

Do the right thing right now, Premier, and order CN to clean up this ongoing environmental disaster.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Obviously, everyone on this side of the House appreciates the question from the member from Nickel Belt. She would know at this point that a number of us—myself included, and the current Minister of Energy, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and a number of MPPs on this side of

the House—have, literally since the day the derailment took place a number of months ago, paid especially close attention to what’s taking place. I know that I had the opportunity, days after the derailment, to be in Gogama myself to meet with people from that community, to meet with CN and others.

We on this side of the House take rail safety at all times in an extremely important way. I have personally had conversations with my federal counterpart about the importance of making sure that whether we’re talking about northern Ontario or other parts of this province or country, rail safety remains a priority.

We’ll continue to work with the residents in this area and with CN to make sure that we get it right.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Back to the Premier: The Premier just said that we have to be “impeccable stewards” of our gift of water. Yet since the ice came off of the water this spring, I’ve asked this government dozens of times to come and help, but they won’t. I don’t get it. It won’t cost a cent for the province to order CN to clean up their mess. There are companies on the ground, on-site in Gogama, that are ready to do the work.

Will the Premier do the right thing for our water today and for our water for generations to come and order CN to clean up the mess?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to emphasize again to the member from Nickel Belt that this is an issue that we on this side of the House take very, very seriously. I mentioned in the earlier answer that a number of us have had the chance to be in Gogama since the derailment. We understand how important it is to make sure we get this right, and of course we understand how critical it is that people living in Gogama or in the areas around Gogama or anywhere else in the province of Ontario have access to safe water. That’s a fundamental principle, and we understand that.

We will, on this side of the House, continue to work with the residents and with CN. I know that the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and others on this side of the House understand how important it is that we make sure that we get it right. I would emphasize again that from transportation’s perspective in particular, we will continue to push the message of rail safety at all times with our federal counterparts.

RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, our government has made a historic commitment to investing in infrastructure across this province. Through the Moving Ontario Forward plan, we are committing \$31.5 billion to improve transportation and transit from Cornwall to Windsor. In fact, \$16 billion of that funding will go to communities outside the greater Toronto-Hamilton area, like the eight municipalities in my riding of Northumberland–Quinte West.

The Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund—or, as we call it, OCIF—has helped small and rural municipal-

ities invest in critical infrastructure like roads and water mains. Across northeastern Ontario, 116 communities will receive a total of \$58 million over the next three years to support their upgrades to critical local infrastructure. Our government recently announced that it’s providing Kapuskasing with \$2.8 million in funding for infrastructure upgrades.

Minister, can you please tell this House how OCIF is benefiting communities across rural and northern Ontario?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Northumberland–Quinte West for his question this morning. We do know that before the member entered this House in 2003, he was the most distinguished mayor from Brighton, Ontario.

I recall that the member, of course, was a leader with AMO and ROMA. Just recently, I had the opportunity to reread some of his old speeches that he made to those organizations. What has been very consistent about his message back then, of course, was the need to continue to invest in rural infrastructure in the province of Ontario.

Just to give a little historical context: In late 1990s, there was a committee called the Who Does What committee, and I remember that they made the recommendations. I was part of, in those days—the Who Does What became the “who got done in” committee. That was municipalities, because they provided no funding for infrastructure in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It’s good to hear from the minister about infrastructure in rural and northern communities to build a future that’s bright for young Ontarians.

I know that members opposite like to claim that we’re only investing in transit in Toronto, and it’s nice to see that our government is committed to helping rural communities meet their infrastructure needs.

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There is always more that we can do, and I know our rural municipal partners had feedback for improving the OCIF during consultations and through forums like the Rural Ontario Municipal Association’s annual conference. In particular, they requested that more of the OCIF be dedicated to formula-based funding so that they had a predictable source of infrastructure money.

Can the minister please explain whether rural municipalities will be receiving more formula-based funding under the OCIF, as they requested?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the honourable member for his supplementary.

I talked about his previous speeches; now I can quote one from his latest speech. He said just recently that over the next three years, we’ll be investing \$670 million—that’s right, \$670 million—in the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund.

As the member mentioned, our municipal friends asked for more of that funding to be formula-based, and I’m extremely proud that we listened. We’re providing more than \$420 million in formula-based funding, delivered to our rural municipal partners over that period.

Just a couple of weeks ago, our government announced that, through the OCIF, Hastings county, the city of Belleville and Prince Edward county will receive more than \$12 million in formula funding over the next three years. That's a record by anybody's measurement.

After last week's announcement, Prince Edward county Mayor Robert Quaiff stated this: "I'm glad to see the province devoting funds to help us revitalize our roads," bridges and other important infrastructure. "It's a very necessary and welcome investment."

The mayor of Kapuskasing said—

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

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Premier. On September 19, my Liberal colleague from Peterborough, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, was quoted in the Peterborough Examiner as saying that while he works hard "trying to promote the interests of agriculture—getting others in the Ontario Liberal government to listen is a challenge."

My question is, why is the Premier not supporting her own Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay, you've had your fun.

Minister?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for the question. It's a little like getting a fastball right down the middle of the plate.

I want to tell the honourable member what we're doing. This government has provided unprecedented support for the agricultural community in the province of Ontario—a sector that generates \$36.6 billion to Ontario's GDP each and every year. You don't achieve those kinds of results without getting the support from the Premier, every member of this cabinet and every member of this caucus to make sure that happens each and every day.

Mr. Speaker, at 5:30 a.m. this morning, 790,000 Ontarians got up to get to their jobs in this important sector—something we support every day.

Interjections.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: Well, I thank the minister for the curveball, but really, the comment in the Peterborough Examiner simply confirms the disregard that this government has for our farmers and for rural Ontario.

Hard-working rural Ontarians and workers in our agriculture sector are facing difficult conditions, including the crippling cost of hydro, the overburden of unnecessary regulations and outright government intrusions into the way they do their business. But their pleas for

relief and support from this government are going unanswered.

Will the Premier or the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs name the members of caucus who do not support?

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the member for the supplementary. Not only do I hit fastballs, curveballs and cutters, I can hit them all at any time when they throw them at me.

Let me put this in context. You want to talk about support for farmers? A number of years ago, my predecessor Carol Mitchell brought forward a plan to provide \$100 million for a risk management program for farmers in the province of Ontario. That party and that party never supported it.

When you talk about supporting them, we have a track record. We're supporting agriculture each and every day, and we'll continue to support agriculture.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier. When people in Ontario need surgery, they should be able to get it regardless of where they live in the province. But people in my community are waiting as long as 449 days for hip or knee replacement. One of my constituents, Louise West, has been told that she will have to wait 27 months—more than two years—for knee replacement surgery, all the while paying for pain relief out of her own pocket.

We are at a critical moment, Speaker. If we don't cut wait times in London, more and more people will continue to suffer. When will the Premier take action to increase funding for surgeries in the London area so that people in my community are no longer forced to wait longer than anyone else in Ontario for the surgeries they need?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member for the question. We recognize that more work needs to be done when it comes to wait times across this province, but I'm proud of the success that we've had, including in London, where in the last decade we've reduced the wait time for hip surgery by 15%. At the same time, we've reduced that 90th percentile, which is how we measure it, by 32% over the last decade, for knee replacement.

In fact, the budget that the member opposite voted against earlier this year invested an additional \$50 million, including half a million dollars going specifically to the South West LHIN for wait times to continue to provide and offer those services.

Mr. Speaker, we do recognize that from time to time—and wait-lists and wait times are based on a whole set of factors, including the prioritization that our

clinicians themselves make. I'm happy to address it more and the success that we've seen in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, wait times have gotten worse under this Liberal government, not better. People who need surgeries cannot wait months on end to be able to walk again, stand again or live without constant pain.

The wait time for knee replacement at London Health Sciences Centre is 108 days longer than this government's target wait time. People in London are suffering, and this Premier isn't doing anything to help. When will the Premier put people first for a change and cut wait times for surgery in London?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, we are working with the South West LHIN. I know the South West LHIN is looking at the particular situation in London as well.

I resent the implication that somehow we're focusing all our attention on other parts of the province. When you actually look at hip and knee replacement around the province today, the shortest wait time in the province for a hip replacement is not in Toronto, as the member I'm sure would suggest, but it's actually at North Bay General Hospital, followed by Bluewater Health in Sarnia, Sault Area Hospital and then Cambridge Memorial Hospital.

In fact, we have the best wait times in Canada. We have wait times that are better than the UK and better than Canada. In fact, when you look at knee replacement surgery, we're approximately half of the average in the entire OECD. For a hip, it's also below the OECD average and the best in Canada.

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

The House recessed from 1139 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce Vince and Espy Leitao, who are here today for the re-introduction of Jonathan's Law. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GIRLS IN GOVERNMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Last year, I decided to adopt a program called Girls in Government and Leadership for grades 5 through 8 students in Nepean-Carleton. I was able to hold a one-day program at my own daughter's school—Victoria's—at Manordale Public School. We talked about advocacy and how girls and women can have the ability to make change.

I was amazed to see the impact it had on so many young girls, including my daughter's best friend, Jaden

Croucher. She's 11 years old—just had her birthday last week. She spent Friday evening with my family and she decided that she wanted to advocate on an issue that recently came up across the province. I know that her class is watching right now.

She wrote to the local media and to myself. I'll read you part of her letter: "My name is Jaden. I'm here to protest the 10 months of suspension for Dr. Mahavir Singh Rekhi.... I think Dr. Mahavir should at least get his licence removed forever" due to his abuse of animals. "Just because animals don't have a voice doesn't mean they can be abused.... Animals don't have a voice, so who will speak for them?" Jaden concludes her letter: "I'm hoping my concern will make the court rethink their decision. And everyone can write an email to their MPP."

Jaden is brave, and she's also very sweet. She's willing to be interviewed and talk about the issue for the next generation.

I stand in this House to say that I'm extremely proud of Jaden and all the girls at Manordale Public School who have taken a stand for what they believe in.

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Today I will be reintroducing Jonathan's Law. Jonathan's Law will make it possible for an employee whose child has died to have an unpaid leave of absence for up to 52 weeks.

Currently, parents are entitled to a leave while a child is critically ill or if a child dies as a result of a crime. But when a child dies as a result of illness or accident, the parents are supposed to be ready to go back to work after 10 days. Speaker, that does not work.

The bill is named Jonathan's Law in tribute to Jonathan Leitao, who died of cancer in 2014. He was 16. Jonathan's father, Vince Leitao, and his mother, Espy Leitao, are with us today. They spearheaded the work to pull together this bill.

I want to thank Jonathan Miles and Meighan Ferris-Miles, also bereaved parents of their young son, who worked on this bill, and Carolyn Baltaz, who is the chair of Bereaved Families of Ontario.

I thank all of them for the work they did on background, the work they did to pull together the law, and the courage they've shown when presenting this issue to the public.

UNITED ACHIEVERS' CLUB

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Two weeks ago, as I do each year, I had the pleasure of attending the 32nd annual United Achievers' Club Scholarship and Recognition Awards dinner. On September 17, 15 recipients were recognized with scholarships in Brampton, with approximately 200 guests in attendance.

The keynote address was delivered by Miss Tanya Walker, a Law Society of Upper Canada bencher and lawyer.

The United Achievers' Club was established in Brampton in 1980 and gave its first scholarship in 1985.

This year's scholarship recipients recognized at the dinner were Shontia Anderson, Kymani Carter, Kiana Crawford-Matthews, Vashti Darko, Jordan Gray, Sydney Hussett, Raenelle Manning, Jalesa Martin, Benjamin McDonald, Justin McKenzie, Akachukwu Nwakoby, Caitlin Peart, Dené Pellington, Sanjay Persad and Katerah Phillips.

Recognized for outstanding service to the community were the Free for All Foundation, the United Achievers' Seniors Group, and John Cockburn, a past president of the Kiwanis Club of Brampton and an active member for more than 50 years.

BREAST CANCER

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to rise today to acknowledge Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer amongst Canadian women and is the second leading cause of death. It is estimated that in 2015, 25,000 women were diagnosed with breast cancer. Among those 25,000 cancer diagnoses, 5,000 women died as a result of this disease. Breast cancer occurs most frequently in women between the ages of 50 and 69, although it can occur at any age. Breast cancer is not gender-specific. In 2015, 220 men were diagnosed with the disease, and 60 died as a result.

It's important to be mindful of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, which include a lump in the breast or armpit, changes in the breast's shape or size, or skin changes. Some risk factors may include family history, exposure to ionizing radiation, oral contraceptives, alcohol, or high socio-economic status. Breast cancer screenings are available and recommended for women between the ages of 50 to 69, and it's also recommended that women within this age range receive a mammogram every two years.

I would like to acknowledge and thank John Baines and his daughter Kelly, from my riding. Each year, they organize Bowling for Boobs in St. Thomas. For years, they have been fundraising and raising awareness around breast cancer.

The Canadian Cancer Society has also created a wonderful support program and funding initiative called the Women to Women Movement. It creates ambassadors and empowers women to educate other women about screenings while raising funds at the same time.

As October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I encourage all Ontarians to get involved in their community to raise awareness regarding this terrible disease.

WORLD ARCHITECTURE DAY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Today is World Architecture Day. I want to thank the Ontario Association of Architects for hosting a breakfast this morning in the legislative dining room.

World Architecture Day was founded to remind the world of the importance of architects in building cities of

the future. It's important to acknowledge that, moving forward, there are certain principles that we will need to rely on architects for to ensure that our cities are more sustainable, are built in a way that is environmentally friendly and are built in ways that work with the environments that they are built in. There's also an ever-increasing importance of ensuring that architects continue to build more affordable housing as well as create density in effective ways.

I myself am working with an architect on a project that is near and dear to me, which is my home. In the members' gallery: I would like to introduce Oliver Dang, who is my architect—thank you very much—and a special shout-out to Qanuk's designers Sarah and Lindsay, who are the design team.

It's extremely important for us to acknowledge the great work of the many people in our society who make our societies better. But I think it's particularly important, given the direction we're headed in this society, to acknowledge the work of architects: to do what they are tasked to do under the Architects Act, "to promote public appreciation of architecture and the allied arts and sciences," and to ensure that we build cities that are based on building and houses that are sustainable and that lead the way.

WORLD ARCHITECTURE DAY

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Indeed, today is World Architecture Day. The first Monday of October of each year has been deemed to be this very important day where we consider the contributions made to our communities, to our cities and to our daily lives by architects.

Mr. Speaker, what drew me to study architecture and to that profession was the ability to help improve our community and improve my neighbours' lives. Architects throughout this province are collaborators, artists and ultimately problem solvers, solving the problems of how to make our communities and cities more livable and how to make our grand places and our more humble places viable, pleasant to live in and pleasant to work in.

World Architecture Day is important because it focuses everyone's attention on what are some core human needs: shelter, community, and space that is livable, is inspiring and helps us achieve those things we aspire to.

Today, we're very grateful to the Ontario Association of Architects and its president, Toon Dreesen, who's here to inform about these issues. Today, Mr. Speaker, it's important that all MPPs recognize that architecture matters.

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm here to recognize the great work done by Junior Achievement in my riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex and right across Ontario. Junior Achievement is the largest youth business education organization in Canada. For over 60 years, they have been preparing young people to succeed.

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I was fortunate enough to participate in Junior Achievement when I was in high school, so I can personally appreciate the impact of their work and how they can inspire young entrepreneurs. Today, thousands of dedicated volunteers continue to deliver financial literacy, work readiness and entrepreneurship programs that give students the knowledge and confidence to meet the personal and professional challenges of their future.

The Ontario PC caucus recognizes that financial literacy is critical. We applaud Junior Achievement's work to give the development of these vital real-life skills, such as budgeting and investing, a greater presence in our public education system. With the recent revelation that half of Ontario's grade 6 students are failing to meet the provincial standards for math and the news that household and government debt have reached all-time highs in our province, financial literacy is clearly more important than ever.

Mr. Speaker, I want to encourage all students and parents to explore the opportunities offered by Junior Achievement, as well as to commend the businesses and thousands of volunteers who make these educational opportunities possible.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Rainbow District School Board announced that a significant decline in provincial funding has triggered accommodation reviews for many of their schools. What does that mean for my riding?

In the valley, they will move kids from grades 7 and 8 from one school to a school further away, and the other ones, the juniors to 5, will be moved into another school.

What does that mean for the people in Chelmsford? Well, the Chelmsford high school would be closed. The kids would be bused either to Val Caron or to a school in Sudbury. Then, the kids from Chelmsford, from Dowling, from Onaping and from Levack would all be bused to the empty secondary school in Chelmsford. For little kids, age 4 and 5, who go from Geneva Lake in my riding to Chelmsford, that means they will spend more time on the bus than in the classroom.

In the west end of my riding, the news is no better. They are planning to close the Lively high school. All of the kids from Lively will be bused—you guessed it—to schools in Sudbury, and the 7s and 8s would be moved into the already-tight-for-space Walden Public School.

I have seen this movie before, Speaker, and it always works the same way: Kids in rural schools in Nickel Belt get bused to big urban schools in Sudbury. Do you know what that means? That means that the school is there to teach the kids—but it's there to build healthy communities, and we're losing all of that.

ROSH HASHANAH

Mr. Mike Colle: Today I'm honoured to commemorate Rosh Hashanah, a very important High Holy Day for

members of the Jewish community all over Ontario and in my riding of Eglinton–Lawrence and all over the world.

As members of the Jewish faith come together to celebrate Rosh Hashanah—marking a time of year in their lives to reflect on the year ahead. This past Sunday evening marked the first day of Rosh Hashanah, translated as the “head of the year.” It also means the Jewish New Year. It is one of the High Holy Day holidays. On this day, Jews are called to examine their lives, focus on repentance, and plan for the new year.

Some of the observances during Rosh Hashanah include blowing the shofar, a hollowed-out ram's horn. The blowing of the shofar is meant to wake up the soul and motivate repentance during Rosh Hashanah. Eating sweet foods, like apple dipped in honey, pomegranates, challah, symbolizing the hope for a sweet new year—and a special prayer is recited thereafter: “May it be thy will, O Lord, our God, to grant us a year that is good and sweet.”

I want to wish all of the Jews in my community a sweet and happy and healthy new year, and especially to my good friend Mel Korn, who had a bicycle accident yesterday and was taken to Humber River Hospital but is doing fine. I want to wish Shana Tova Umetukah to all my friends and my community.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**JONATHAN'S LAW
(EMPLOYEE LEAVE OF ABSENCE
WHEN CHILD DIES), 2016**

**LOI JONATHAN DE 2016
SUR LE CONGÉ DES EMPLOYÉS
EN CAS DE DÉCÈS D'UN ENFANT**

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 31, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 to entitle an employee whose child has died to a leave of absence / Projet de loi 31, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi pour donner aux employés dont l'enfant est décédé le droit à un congé.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, any parent who has to deal with the death of a child is dealing with profound emotions, dealing with a situation that is extraordinarily difficult. All those parents deserve some leave. This bill will provide that.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

Minister?

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following changes be made to the ballot list: Mr. Potts and Mr. Anderson exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Potts assumes ballot item number 13 and Mr. Anderson assumes ballot item number 62; and Mr. Qaadri and Mr. Sergio exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Qaadri assumes ballot item number 9 and Mr. Sergio assumes ballot item number 21; and that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 7, 9, 13, 14 and 21 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister has moved that, notwithstanding order 98(b), the following changes be made to the ballot list—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Dispense? Dispensed.

On the motion, do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the current government under Premier Kathleen Wynne is calling for the sale of up to 60% of Hydro One shares into private ownership; and

“Whereas the decision to sell the public utility was made without any public input and the deal will continue to be done in complete secrecy; and

“Whereas the loss of majority ownership in Hydro One will force ratepayers to accept whatever changes the new owners decide, such as higher rates; and

“Whereas electricity rates are already sky-high and hurting family budgets as well as businesses; and

“Whereas ratepayers will never again have independent investigations of consumer complaints, such as the Ontario Ombudsman's damning report on failed billing; and

“Whereas the people of Ontario are the true owners of Hydro One and they do not believe the fire sale of Hydro One is in their best interest;

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

“To protect Ontario ratepayers by stopping the sale of Hydro One.”

I fully support this petition and will affix my name and send it with page Ryan.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Mr. Paul Miller: “Whereas a growing number of Ontarians are concerned about the growth in low-wage, part-time, casual, temporary and insecure employment; and

“Whereas too many workers are not protected by the minimum standards outlined in existing employment and labour laws; and

“Whereas the Ontario government is currently reviewing employment and labour laws in the province;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change employment and labour laws to accomplish the following:

“—ensure that part-time, temporary, casual and contract workers receive the same pay and benefits as their full-time permanent counterparts;

“—promote full-time, permanent work with adequate hours for all those who choose it;

“—offer fair scheduling with proper advance notice;

“—provide at least seven (7) days of paid sick leave each year;

“—prevent employers from downloading their responsibilities for minimum standards onto temporary agencies, subcontractors or workers themselves;

“—end the practice of contract flipping, support wage protection and job security for workers when companies change ownership or contracts expire;

“—extend minimum protections to all workers by eliminating exemptions to the laws;

“—protect workers who stand up for their rights;

“—offer proactive enforcement of the laws through adequate public staffing and meaningful penalties for employers who violate the laws;

“—make it easier for workers to join unions; and

“—all workers must be paid at least \$15 an hour, regardless of their age, student status, job or sector of employment.”

I agree fully with these petitions. There are hundreds here just from one area.

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ICE MACHINES

Mr. Arthur Potts: I too have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas ice machines are found everywhere throughout the health care system, including long-term-care facilities and hospitals; and

“Whereas numerous bacteria and viruses are known to contaminate ice cubes, including cholera, typhoid fever, salmonella, legionella, E. coli, shigella, hepatitis A and norovirus; and

“Whereas the lack of regulation increases the probability of consuming ice from ice machines with unhygienic levels of bacteria and/or viruses, putting public safety at risk; and

“Whereas individuals consuming ice from a contaminated ice machine in a hospital or long-term-care facility are at a greater risk due to potentially weakened immune systems; and

“Whereas the inherent risk and rate at which both bacteria and biofilm grow inside ice machines have caused other countries to mandate the cleaning of ice machines; and

“Whereas there are currently no mandates or guidelines on the frequency or thoroughness of cleaning for institutional ice machines in hospitals, long-term-care or other health care facilities;

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

“That the province of Ontario establish and enforce cleaning and hygiene standards for all institutional ice machines in provincially funded and/or operated facilities.”

I certainly agree with this petition and will leave it with Sophia.

DENTAL CARE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: “Whereas lack of access to dental care affects overall health and well-being, and poor oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory disease, and Alzheimer’s disease; and

“Whereas it is estimated that two to three million people in Ontario have not seen a dentist in the past year, mainly due to the cost of private dental services; and

“Whereas approximately every nine minutes a person in Ontario arrives at a hospital emergency room with a dental problem but can only get painkillers and antibiotics, and this costs the health care system at least \$31 million annually with no treatment of the problem;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in public oral health programs for low-income adults and seniors....”

I agree with this petition and affix my signature.

ÉDUCATION EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ça me fait plaisir de présenter cette pétition.

« Étant donné que la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés garantit l'accès à une éducation publique en français;

« Étant donné que plus de 1 000 élèves fréquentent les écoles élémentaires françaises de Toronto–Danforth et Beaches–East York ... la plus importante concentration d'élèves francophones à Toronto, et qu'il n'existe aucune école secondaire française dans le centre ... ;

« Étant donné que plusieurs écoles anglaises du “quartier” sont occupées à moins de 50 %;

« Étant donné que beaucoup d'enfants sont contraints à l'assimilation au système anglais par manque d'écoles secondaires et que l'école élémentaire est insuffisante pour donner une connaissance durable du français;

« Étant donné que le gouvernement de l'Ontario a reconnu, en 2007, la pénurie d'écoles francophones dans le grand Toronto, et que le Commissariat aux services en français cite, en 2011, le “besoin criant d'au moins une école secondaire de langue française dans le secteur est de Toronto”;

« Étant donné que le ministère de l'Éducation reconnaît que tous les citoyens sont gagnants lorsque les écoles sont utilisées de manière optimale ... ;

« Étant donné que les conseils propriétaires ne mettent pas d'école ou de terrain en disponibilité dans “le quartier” ... ; »

Ils demandent à l'Assemblée législative :

« Que la ministre de l'Éducation intervienne pour rendre disponible une école de qualité dans les circonscriptions Toronto–Danforth ou Beaches–East York qui ... accueillera nos enfants, accordant ainsi à nos enfants le même droit qu'aux enfants anglophones. »

J'appuie cette pétition, je vais y affixer mon nom, et je demande à Ryan de l'amener à la table des greffiers.

HOME INSPECTION INDUSTRY

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I have a petition here that's 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 this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it to the table with Om.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas household electricity bills have skyrocketed by 56% and electricity rates have tripled as a result of the Liberal government’s mismanagement of the energy sector;

“Whereas the billion-dollar gas plants cancellation, wasteful and unaccountable spending at Ontario Power Generation and the unaffordable subsidies in the Green Energy Act will result in” hydro “bills climbing by another 35% by 2017 and 45% by 2020; and

“Whereas the Liberal government wasted \$2 billion on the flawed smart meter program; and

“Whereas the recent announcement to implement the Ontario Electricity Support Program will see average household hydro bills increase an additional \$137 per year starting in 2016; and

“Whereas the soaring cost of electricity is straining family budgets, and hurting the ability of manufacturers and small businesses in the province to compete and create new jobs; and

“Whereas home heating and electricity are a necessity for families in Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government’s mismanagement of the energy sector;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately implement policies ensuring Ontario’s power consumers, including families, farmers and employers, have affordable and reliable electricity.

I agree with this petition and I send it down with page Cameron.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: The bill number referred to in this petition changed with prorogation, but I’m still going to read it because it’s still relevant.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Support Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence.

“Whereas half of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, and approximately every six days a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner; and

“Whereas a 2014 national survey showed that Canadian workers who experience domestic violence often disclose the violence to a co-worker, and that the violence frequently follows the worker to work; and

“Whereas the experience of domestic violence and sexual violence can cause significant physical, mental, emotional and financial hardship for survivors, their families, and society as a whole; and

“Whereas Canadian employers lose \$78 million annually due to domestic violence, and \$18 million due to sexual violence, because of direct and indirect impacts that include distraction, decreased productivity, and absenteeism; and

“Whereas workers who experience domestic violence or sexual violence should not have to jeopardize their employment in order to seek medical attention, access counselling, relocate, or deal with police, lawyers or the courts; and

“Whereas the final report of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment recommended that the Ontario government make education about domestic or intimate partner violence in the workplace mandatory for managers, supervisors, and workers;

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

“That the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 177 to provide employees who have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence (or whose children have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence) with up to 10 days of paid leave, reasonable unpaid leave, and options for flexible work arrangements, and to require employers to provide mandatory workplace training about domestic violence and sexual violence.”

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

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime.

“When public education about sexual violence and harassment is not prioritized, myths and attitudes informed by misogyny become prevalent. This promotes rape culture.

“Less than 10% of sexual violence cases are reported to police. For every 33 that are reported, only three result in a conviction.

“Sexual violence and harassment survivors too often feel revictimized by the systems set in place to support them. The voices of survivors, in all their diversity, need to be amplified....

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

“Support the findings and recommendations of the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment’s final report, highlighting the need for inclusive and open dialogue to address misogyny and rape culture; educate about sexual violence and harassment to promote social change ... and address attrition rates within our justice system, including examining ‘unfounded’ cases, developing enhanced prosecution models and providing free legal advice for survivors.”

Speaker, I agree with this petition, will put my name to it and hand it to page Nicole.

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I support it and will send it with page Om.

DISASTER RELIEF

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Madame Monique Laurin from Gogama for this petition. It reads as follows:

“Whereas at 2 a.m. on March 7, 2015, a Canadian National train derailed just outside of Gogama;

“Whereas this derailment caused numerous tank cars carrying crude oil to explode, catch fire and spill over one million litres of oil into the Makami River; and

“Whereas residents continue to plainly observe an oil sheen and find dead fish on the Makami River as well as Lake Minisinakwa, despite the fact that the Ministry of the Environment has declared the cleanup complete;

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

“That the Ministry of the Environment require CN to continue the cleanup of Gogama’s soil and waterways until the residents are assured of clean and safe access to water for drinking and recreation.”

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

LUNG HEALTH

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children;

“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;

“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; 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.”

I agree with this petition, will put my name to it and hand it to page Tegan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, that concludes the time we have available for petitions this afternoon.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Attorney General and government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 28, An Act to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act, the Vital Statistics Act and various other Acts respecting parentage and related registrations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Unfortunately, I have to remind the Attorney General that we have to call the order first before you move second reading of the bill.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker: government order G28.

ALL FAMILIES ARE EQUAL ACT (PARENTAGE AND RELATED REGISTRATIONS STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR L’ÉGALITÉ DE TOUTES LES FAMILLES (MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LA FILIATION ET LES ENREGISTREMENTS CONNEXES)

Mr. Naqvi moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 28, An Act to amend the Children’s Law Reform Act, the Vital Statistics Act and various other Acts respecting parentage and related registrations / Projet de loi 28, Loi modifiant la Loi portant réforme du droit de l’enfance, la Loi sur les statistiques de l’état civil et diverses autres lois en ce qui concerne la filiation et les enregistrements connexes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Mr. Naqvi has moved second reading of Bill 28. I assume the minister would like to lead off the debate.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me to speak on a very important bill. As you can tell, I’m very excited to speak to the bill and, therefore, moved one step earlier in the process for the debate.

Speaker, it’s really my true honour to rise today to speak on the proposed All Families Are Equal Act, 2016.

I will say with utmost sincerity that I am very proud of this bill. I believe in the principle that everyone in our province should be treated equally, no matter their race, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. Ontarians value diversity and they value equality, and supporting those core values are what this bill is all about.

I also believe this bill responds to a key priority of our government, and that is to make everyday life easier for Ontarians and to remove unnecessary burdens and costs on our families.

Ontarians know that family structures are as diverse and unique as the people who make up this great province of ours. There is no one way to start and raise a family. In the year 2016, this is something we, as a government, and as a society more broadly, have not only come to accept but embrace. Today we expect that members of the LGBTQ2+ community enjoy the same rights as their heterosexual neighbours: the right to love and marry the person of their choosing, and the right to start and raise a family.

It may come as a surprise to many to learn that not every family is being treated the same under the current law in the province of Ontario when it comes to who is considered a legal parent. Right now, under the current law, some parents have to go to court to be declared as their child's parent. Imagine having to spend extra time and money to be legally recognized as parents. For example, if a lesbian couple uses a sperm donor to help them conceive a child, under the current law today the birth mother and the sperm donor would be the child's parents, even if that donor had no intention of raising the child. Meanwhile, the birth mother's partner would have to go to the court to be declared a legal parent; in other words, they're adopting their own child.

As I have been working on this bill, Speaker, I often cite the following as an example when I try to explain to people what we're trying to do: When my wife, Christine, and I had our second baby, Elliana, most recently—

Interjection.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you. Elliana was born on a Friday afternoon. By Sunday afternoon, I was sitting in the hospital, in Christine's bed, and we had my iPad and we logged on to the ServiceOntario website, put in my name, put in Christine's name, put in Elliana's name, all that information, and, boom, we were registered. Our daughter was registered as our child. By Wednesday or Thursday, in the mail came her birth certificate and her social insurance number. I know at ServiceOntario, they guarantee you, very fast. All that stuff came in and we just had to pay a simple fee. That's easy. That's how parents do it.

But that option is not available to two mothers having their daughter. They don't have that option of just going online today and to be able to register both parents and register their child. No, in that instance, the other parent has to go to the court and adopt their own daughter to be recognized as a parent. That's the inequality. That is the

difference we are solving through this legislation—to ensure that all parents in Ontario and all children in Ontario are treated alike, are treated equally, and everybody has the same opportunity, if they can, to just sit on their home bed or their hospital bed with their iPad or whatever device they want to use, go online and register their child by paying a simple fee.

Speaker, as I said, the proposed legislation would, if passed, ensure that both moms—that is, the birth parent and the birth parent's partner—are legally recognized as their child's parents from the moment the child is born, without a court declaration, without a court order and all the associated costs that come with it.

1340

This doesn't just apply to the LGBTQ2+ community. With this bill, we're working to create a future where all couples who conceive children using assisted reproduction do not have to go through unnecessary steps to be recognized as their child's parents. The reality is that some couples just can't have a baby on their own and must rely on donors to conceive, or find a surrogate to carry the child. Right now, couples who use a surrogate need a court order to be recognized as their child's parents. Our proposed legislation would allow those couples to be legally recognized as parents sooner, provided that they have a written agreement with the surrogate before conception, the surrogate obtained independent legal advice before entering into the agreement, and she confirms her consent to give up her parental rights after the baby is born.

Likewise, the updated law would also mean that other people who agreed to parent a child together won't have to go to court to be recognized as parents of the child, provided there is an agreement before the baby is conceived.

Our government believes that the best thing for a child is for there to be certainty about who their parents are at the earliest possible time. Of course, for parents, what all parents do when a baby is born or comes into our lives is to pay attention to the child, to provide all the important necessities of life to the child and to give them the love they need. Parents, when a baby comes into our lives, should be more focused on diapers and naptime, not on getting lawyers to get court declarations to be recognized as parents. That, I think, is a very important step.

The other very important aspect in this bill, through the Vital Statistics Act, is that we're ensuring that our forms reflect the reality of our families today. For that, it is extremely important that we use gender-neutral language in our forms. You will see, in Bill 28, references to using language such as "parents" as opposed to just "mother" and "father," to ensure that all our forms are understanding of all families and all parents in our province.

Our plan is to update these forms in the manual form they exist in, in the paper form they exist in, and, of course, to change these forms online, so that the ease of convenience is available to all parents in the province.

I also just wanted to take a few moments to acknowledge the many people who have helped with the creation

of this bill. First, I want to recognize Rachel Epstein, and Jennifer and Kirsti Mathers McHenry and their children, Cy and Ruby. They are with us today. Thank you very much for your incredible advocacy—and a big thanks to Kirsti and Jennifer for lending their children's names to the bill that the member from Parkdale–High Park brought forward. My understanding is that it says “Cy and Ruby,” but Ruby is older than Cy. So it should have been “Ruby and Cy,” but somehow it happened to be “Cy and Ruby.” I'm sure Kirsti and Jennifer are working that out at home.

They have been incredible partners during this entire journey by sharing their own personal story—which is difficult, at times, for anybody to do—with the entire province, but also compelling us, the legislators and the government, to take that important step as well.

I noticed that Joanna Radbord is also in the House. Thank you, Joanna, for being here. Joanna's son Cameron is a page, who I did not acknowledge last time—I don't know if Cameron is in the House right now or if he's in his math class; I think he's probably in his math class if he's not here. but thank you, Joanna, for your legal expertise in this very important issue as well.

Clearly, this has been a team effort, and I do want to take a bit of time to recognize the member from Parkdale–High Park for introducing a private member's bill on this matter. I have had the great honour and opportunity to work with the member from Parkdale–High Park now on a few occasions, on some very important bills. She has been—to me, personally—a leader in a lot of these important issues and an education for me. It has always been an honour to work with you, honourable member.

Over the summer we worked closely with the member from Parkdale–High Park, and I believe that the legislation we have introduced achieves the same overall goals as her private member's bill. I would like to thank the member for her advocacy on this important issue and for her leadership.

In developing this bill, Speaker, my ministry also met with a number of other key stakeholders' groups, including lawyers, fertility experts and members of the LGBTQ2+ community, to get their input on our proposed bill. We also drew on the work already undertaken by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada, including the Manitoba Law Reform Commission, and the experiences of BC and Alberta.

I want to sincerely thank everyone who participated for their time and valuable contribution to the process. I also would like to thank the very hardworking members of my staff, and Susan Kushneryk, here in the chamber, for spending her entire summer working on this important bill, and staff from the Ministry of the Attorney General. There is an entire team of very dedicated people who worked extremely hard throughout the summer, meeting with our stakeholders, learning from them, discussing ideas, drafts being exchanged, to make sure that we have a bill that really ensures quality in our province.

Speaker, the proposed All Families Are Equal Act will seek to end the legal uncertainty faced by parents who

conceive their children using assisted reproduction. Our bill would update Ontario's parentage laws so parents who have children with the assistance of a known donor won't need to spend money on lawyers. They also won't need to take time off work to go to court just so they can be legally recognized as their child's parents.

This is about ensuring that all kids conceived with or without assistance are treated equally by recognizing the legal status of their parents, whether they are LGBTQ2+ or straight. This is about ensuring that all families in Ontario are treated equally.

Speaker, at this time our government will not be putting forth any more speakers towards the debate of this bill, so that it is passed as quickly as possible. We are really hopeful that we can move this bill sooner than later to the committee and to third reading, so that it can be passed into law and we can move forward with making important changes in our entire system in terms of all the forms to be updated, so that families can have the opportunity to access a system that accords equality.

As we can all imagine, as we speak children are being born in this province of LGBT parents or straight. We want to make sure we have a regime in place that ensures equality for everyone. We do hope that the opposition parties would agree, as well, that this bill should be passed promptly. I have full confidence in all the honourable members, that they will take this matter seriously and will help in the prompt passage of this bill.

Today, Speaker, I urge all members to stand together in support of equality by supporting this proposed Bill 128. Thank you very much for your time and, once again, thank you to all our great partners who are here in this room. Thank you for your advocacy and being here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: Congratulations to Minister Naqvi—I want to call him Yasir here; I hope you'll indulge that, Mr. Speaker, when it's a friendly thing—on the birth of their second child, and to his wife Christina and her little guy, I forget his name—

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Rafi.

Mr. Bill Walker: Rafi. Thank you very much.

I want to commend him as well—I mean, that's pretty impressive, the birth certificate in four days; you're doing it in the hospital and you're doing it online—but I do want to bring up that one of my colleagues last week, I think it was the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, was talking about how people lose their licence and it takes forever to get it back. I'm not blaming ServiceOntario staff, because it's obviously something that is more at the higher level of a directive. So I hope that the minister will take that back and try to address that one, because people in a rural area like ours not having access to a driver's licence truly impacts their ability for all kinds of things across the spectrum.

1350

My understanding of reading this briefly—and I know we're going to debate a little more this afternoon—is that you're actually going to add more terminology, but you

are going to maintain “mother” and “father.” That’s something, certainly in my riding, I’ve heard—I haven’t heard a lot about this piece of legislation; it’s relatively new. It was on before we left the House, and then, of course, with the prorogation, it has to be reintroduced. But I think what people want is some of that traditional ability to still use the terms “mother” and “father,” “mum” and “dad.” Certainly, that’s what I am most calm with. I think what the minister is doing is bringing some legislation—to bring some modernization to it. There are different terms being used, obviously, in today’s world.

What I also want to talk about—I believe my colleague from Lennox and Addington—there are two more in there.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Frontenac and Lanark.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you—is the backlog in the courts and a lot of this type of thing, where people are trying to go through the courts to be able to do things. I’ve heard more talk, frankly, from parents in my riding about adoption and their ability to actually get there, to actually adopt children and be able to have the family that they want so much. So, Minister, I would like to appeal that we can try to address that issue so that more people can actually enjoy the family life that many of us have the privilege to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure for me to rise today, on behalf of the constituents I represent in London West, to speak to the legislation that is before us this afternoon, the All Families Are Equal Act.

I appreciate the Attorney General acknowledging the incredible advocacy that has been shown by my colleague the member for Parkdale–High Park in bringing this issue forward and in not letting up on making these changes that people in this province have a right to expect.

The Attorney General commented that when you are dealing with the birth of a child, when you are juggling all of the myriad responsibilities that go along with that, you shouldn’t have to worry about what would happen if one of the partners died in childbirth or experienced some kind of tragedy. Heterosexual couples in our province don’t have to be asked for legal recognition as parents, and queer parents shouldn’t have to have that responsibility either.

Ontario courts have recognized that other Canadian jurisdictions already allow equal access to birth registration, and it’s high time for this province to follow suit. Not to move forward on this inequality perpetuates a historical discrimination against LGBTQ families. It is unconstitutional, and it needs to be corrected.

Certainly, members of my caucus are fully in favour of moving this legislation forward to pass these changes as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

I go back to the Attorney General for a response.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to thank the members from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound and London West for their

feedback on the comments I made. I will say to both of them, and I think I heard from both of them, that this is a matter of equality. That’s what this bill is all about; hence the name the All Families Are Equal Act. I think we would all agree that we want all families in our province to have the same opportunities, that we want all children in our province to be treated equally. At the end of the day, the work we do in this Legislature, despite our differences, has only one end, and that is to ensure that there’s prosperity for future generations; that all children in our province, regardless of what background they come from—whether they live in big cities, small towns, north or south, indigenous communities—have the same opportunities.

We know that inequality exists in our laws as it relates to recognition of children. We are, through this bill, rectifying that and we’re making sure that all families, in whatever form they come, have the same opportunities to succeed and thrive, and that those parents who have brought a beautiful new life into this world, into this province, are able to focus on doing what parents do: give love to their children. That’s the essence of this bill.

We call all this debate—that’s the technical term—but I don’t think there’s any debate about this issue. We are talking about something that is innate to us as human beings. We have to pass laws to accomplish that, but so be it. That is our job. For me, this is one of the proudest moments, that I’m standing here and debating on this kind of equality in our province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I do hope that the Attorney General does remain for the debate. I did listen to his portion, but there remain some things that I’m unaware of that weren’t covered in his debate. I’m hoping that the questions that I raise this afternoon are heard and also considered, and possibly even responded to, by the government side during the debate on Bill 28.

I think I want to start off with two things. One of the elements that you see clearly in this bill is a reference to the best interests of the child. That’s made reference to many times in the bill. The second part that I want to explore during this discussion and debate is that we’ve often heard in the past from the government, from the Liberal Party, that they want to make laws and provide legislation based on scientific evidence and facts. I think those two elements need to be—I have some concerns overall.

I don’t have a concern, of course, with equality. I don’t have any hesitation. There are parts of this bill that I think are very much needed, but there are some concerns that remain, some doubts that remain, on how this will all come into play.

So just briefly, we know that under this bill, a child up until the age of one may have upwards of four parents recognized by this legislation. I see the member from High Park shaking her head. Not only is that what I read in the bill, but it is also in the technical briefing provided to myself from the Attorney General—up to four parents

up until age one. But after age one, then, there are no prescribed limits in the legislation at the present.

We know a lot of this bill has to do with advances in reproductive technology, which we also know will continue to advance. How far reproductive technologies will advance is anybody's guess. We would be foolish to believe that further advances won't happen. That's an element that I didn't hear from the Attorney General about this "up to four parents."

Here's my question to the Attorney General: We know our Family Courts and our children's court are significantly burdened with significant delays, wait times and costs. I don't know if the Attorney General—well, I know I didn't hear it, but I don't know if the Attorney General has explored what will be the ramifications on our Family Courts with this bill. Will it exacerbate those already significant delays, costs and burdens? I'm not sure. But neither do I see any evidence provided by the government that they've explored this part of the bill. What will be the consequences of that?

1400

We know that with two parents, Family Courts—with a marital breakdown, it is a timely, costly and very messy situation when two parents have a family breakdown. What happens now with four parents in a marital breakdown? I'm not sure. I don't know if anybody can answer that question. I don't know if anybody has asked the question or explored how that will impact.

I can say—and I think every member of this House will recognize—each of our constituency offices, each member in this House, already has a significant workload assisting and helping constituents with the Family Responsibility Office, every one of us. There have been all kinds of reports from the Ombudsman, from the Auditor General and all kinds of media reports on just how dysfunctional our Family Responsibility Office is and its inability to find remedies for those families that have broken down in many, many cases.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Attorney General on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I apologize to the member for interrupting.

Speaker, I want to rise on a point of order to let the House know that the Treasury Board has tabled Ontario's annual financial statements for 2015-16 with the assembly, and members have also been emailed a copy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Technically not a point of order, but we appreciate the information, I guess.

I return to the member for Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: The Family Responsibility Office is in many cases and for many of our constituents a dysfunctional and broken remedy. It doesn't provide remedy. I'm wondering how this new piece of legislation will impact the Family Responsibility Office. Heaven knows the difficulties and the problems that they have in tracking down a spouse who is delinquent in payments.

How are they going to track down three spouses who are delinquent—or up to three or maybe more—afterwards? I didn't hear anything from the Attorney General that they have explored these consequences. What are they doing? There's nothing in the bill that provides greater abilities to the Family Responsibility Office to address this expanded—I guess that is the best word—scope of jurisdictions that they'll have to deal with.

I heard the Attorney General say that the Liberal government will not be putting up any more speakers on this bill. I think that's the wrong way to go. I think this bill needs to be fleshed out so that we can fully comprehend what we're asking our administrators, what we're asking our courts to accomplish and also to be fair to the people in this province; to show the people in this province that these things, this piece of legislation, is very, very important and that we ought not to take it lightly or to dismiss it—that we don't have to examine it and we don't have to examine the consequences of this legislation, both positive and negative, because, as I said at the beginning, there are parts of this bill that I think are, indeed, positive. Maybe all of it is positive. But we just don't have the information for us to come to that conclusion at the present time. Indeed, I would say that we don't have nearly enough information to make that judgment or come to that conclusion.

This bill often references the courts to make decisions that are in the best interests of the children. We're asking the courts to examine all those details—whether it be with three parents or two parents or four parents or whatever—and make your decisions about custody, make your decisions about child support and make your decisions about parenting direction, based on the best interests of the child. Of course, nobody's going to disagree with that. But I think it's also important that we, in this House, do the same: that we examine this legislation on the basis of what is in the best interests of the children. To me, it's not good enough for us to introduce a piece of legislation that says, "Somebody else will make decisions based on the best interests of the children," if we do not uphold ourselves to the same level of responsibility.

So I beg to differ with the Attorney General. I do hope that the government does put up some more speakers so that some of my concerns and some other concerns that may be raised during debate can be answered and can be fleshed out, again, not solely for our benefit here in this Legislature but also for the benefit of the people we represent, so that they have a better and full understanding of what this bill entails. We can't expect the people we represent to have a full and complete understanding of this legislation if we fail to put any debate and examination into it ourselves.

I also want to raise this with the government and with the Attorney General: Far too often, we see legislation advanced in this assembly where debate is either cut off short procedurally through time allocation motions or programming motions or what have you, and where committees are prevented from further comprehensive examination of the legislation.

There's one right at the moment—Bill 13—that passed second reading due to a time allocation motion last Thursday. It was referred directly to a committee. The people of Ontario had until 3 p.m. Friday afternoon to indicate they had an interest in speaking to that bill in committee. The committee began their deliberations and depositions at 8 a.m. Monday morning—today. Each deputant was provided five minutes to share with the committee their views on Bill 13.

This is too important of a bill—I think Bill 13 was as well—to put that sort of process in front of people, to make people decide immediately, only within hours, to register with a committee and then only to be provided a five-minute presentation. We need to permit and allocate sufficient time for deliberations on Bill 28. Otherwise, we are not doing our job and we also won't be providing the proper guidance to our courts if we pass a bill without thoughtful deliberations and explain how the government sees this coming into play.

1410

As I was contemplating this debate on Bill 28 and this idea of having four parents, I thought back to not only when I was a child but also as a parent. Speaker, I have to say there were times when there were disagreements by my two parents about how I and my eight brothers and sisters would be raised. Whether they be trivial or thought to be minor—whether you should be able to do homework or go out and play or whatever it may be—there were disagreements. And the same, of course, with my wife and I and our four children: We had disagreements.

Having four parents is not going to diminish those disagreements. I would suggest to this House that it in all likelihood may give rise to further disagreements and discussions, or who knows what, on the raising and nurturing of children. I think that's a fair comment. I think it's appropriate for us to understand that. Then again, I just don't believe these elements have been thought out in the best interests of the children. It may be appropriate politically. It may have value in an ideological sense. There may be a whole series of priorities that this government has that it thinks override or—let me put it this way—that the best interests of the children is not the focus of the bill; I don't know. I didn't hear anything from the Attorney General on this.

How are we going to help remedy and help alleviate, help mitigate what appears to be a piece of legislation that may exacerbate or amplify or increase the probability of marital breakdown, or providing care and nurturing to one's child and children? I'm not sure, but I just can't believe that the government would introduce this bill without some recognition that this will, in all likelihood, cause greater difficulties in our family courts.

Judge Brownstone has spoken at length—he's a Family Court judge—and refers to it as “warring couples” in his Family Court and how Family Courts often don't provide the remedy that some are looking for, in that the courts are more often referred to as a “warring” situation where vengeance is sought. I don't

know, when we increase the numbers of parents who might be involved in that situation, how it's not going to be further complicated. Maybe I'm off the mark altogether, Speaker; I don't know. But I think there's merit in this assembly exploring these questions.

I would also ask the Attorney General, going back to my initial statement about making legislation based on scientific fact and evidence: Is there a body of law, a body of information—I haven't seen it, but maybe there is some body of knowledge out there, people who have examined this issue, who have done longer-term studies on these relationships and how they may or may not impact children.

If the government has this information, if they have evidence that either refutes my concerns or alleviates or mitigates my concerns and the concerns of others, I think it would be appropriate that they table that with us, or, during debate, identify for us where we might find it, because I've looked for it. I didn't have a lot of time. Remember that this bill was only introduced on Thursday last week, and this is our first opportunity to discuss the bill. Of course, the indications that we're getting are that this will be our first and possibly only opportunity to discuss this bill.

This bill could have some far-ranging and unforeseen consequences that we've yet to explore. When the bill does go to committee, one of our jobs at committee is to go through this clause-by-clause. Of course, we have limited time, and the bill will already be passed in principle at committee, so there will be no procedural options for us to introduce amendments to the bill that may serve to mitigate these concerns that I'm raising today.

That's not proper. Certainly, it's not proper if we haven't had the time to debate and examine the bill at second reading initially. So I do hope and encourage the government not to be expeditious on this bill, not to be so gung-ho to not debate it.

I would implore the government that this bill does demand and justify a thorough airing in this assembly, and not just leave it to a five-minute deputation at second reading committee.

I will ask that the Attorney General give some assurance as well to the House that people who can provide insight and knowledge regarding these fundamental changes be given adequate time at committee to advance them. Give adequate time for committee members to engage in a discussion with them and ensure, at the end of the day, that this bill, when passed, is indeed more likely to achieve the outcome that the Attorney General has spoken of and less likely to have unforeseen and unintended consequences that are only left up to an agency such as the Family Responsibility Office to try to alleviate or the Family Courts to try to find some clarity within the messiness that may arise.

I think it would be unfair to both those institutions—our Family Courts and our Family Responsibility Office—to put them in that position. I think it would be unfair, of course, to parents and children if we create a legal framework that creates uncertainty and confusion

and messiness because we are gung-ho to pass something in the name of equality.

1420

Equality is great; we all strive for it. However, it is not the only priority that we must consider. It's not the only priority that must be deliberated. We want equality, but we also want a just system, we want to have fairness for all involved, and we want to do things that are indeed in the best interests of the children of this province—and not just put that onus on others, but take that onus ourselves and champion and advocate that we will not pass laws that are not in the best interests of children. I don't believe there's any way we can achieve that end without a full and thoughtful deliberation and discussion and debate at second reading, and I know that will also be required at committee.

I was just saying that too often—here we are in the third week of the second session of the 41st Parliament, and we've already had a bill time-allocated and rammed through. You may be able to justify some time allocations—I don't think so—but with a bill such as this, it can't be justified to ram it through.

Even though the minister has said that they're going to stand down and not debate this bill, if there's anybody on the opposite side who finds that my concerns have merit or have some element of justification, I would encourage you—I'm going to stay here and I'm going to see if the government can answer some of those questions for me. Let's not stand down our obligations when we stand down our debate. Let's stand up to and with our responsibilities and provide the people of this province the duty of care and the duty of responsibility that we all owe them, and ensure that what we do in this assembly will have the good outcomes that we all hope to achieve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): It's now time for questions and comments.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thanks to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington for his intro to concerns that the Progressive Conservative Party might have on this issue.

First of all, let me talk about equality. This is equality, of course, for parents, but it's also equality for their children. I find it very difficult to understand how you could argue that there is anything that is more important than to have equality for our children and that it could be conceivably in the best interests of a child to be unequal to another child. That's what you'll get if you don't pass this bill—with amendments, and I'll talk about those a little later.

Second of all, there was a concern about “mother” and “father.” You can call yourself “mother” and “father.” In fact, the passage of this bill will allow more people to call themselves mothers and fathers with the full weight of the law behind them.

In talking about extended families, that there will be more marital discord with four people than there will be with two: Quite frankly, grandparents, aunts and uncles, others, everyone in a family has a stake in raising a child. In fact, it's been famously said that it takes a village to

raise a child. Again, the more adults who love a child, the better for the child. That's definitely in the best interests of the child.

The Family Responsibility Office—that the courts will be clogged. In fact, it's to lighten the load on the courts that this bill is, in part, being tabled because it will allow parents not to have to use the courts just to adopt their own children. By the way, there's a problem with adopting your own child, because until you do that, you don't have the right to take that child to the doctor. Children could die as a result of parent inequality and child inequality. Think about that in terms of the best interests of the child.

Also, just quickly, if there are more parents, there's more possibility of getting child support, not less—more possibility of getting child support—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Thank you very much. Further questions and comments.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to add some brief comments to Bill 28, An Act to enact the Children's Law Reform Act, the Vital Statistics Act and various other Acts respecting parentage and related registrations.

I was pleased to listen to our critic the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington on this bill. He certainly did raise many questions in his speech. I heard him raising questions about the Family Responsibility Office, and certainly we've had many people in Parry Sound–Muskoka come to our constituency office, looking for help with problems they've run into with the Family Responsibility Office—in many cases a spouse looking to try to collect money that isn't being paid. We've also had a lot of problems with birth certificates in my constituency office.

I'd just note that the member did raise a number of questions and is looking for some responses from the government to those questions. I think that that is certainly very valid. I know the bill seeks to solve some problems, and I think that's a positive thing, problems with parents being recognized as parents without having to go to court. I think that is a positive thing.

Mr. Speaker, I would hope that the government is going to take the bill to committee, as is the usual practice, so that the questions raised by our critic can be answered at committee by the government, so we are fully informed on this bill.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Point of order, the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker. My point of order is that the government announced that they tabled the public accounts and had sent out an email to all members. My office has yet to receive one. I'm just wondering if the minister is really going to send out the copy of the public accounts to members of this Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): It was a valid point of order. I'm not certain that it was the public accounts—we're trying to clarify that—but at the end of

the day it should be up to the minister to make sure that all of those materials are distributed to all members in a fair and equitable manner, and we will hope that the minister will do that as quickly as possible.

Further questions and comments?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Oh, point of order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have it on good authority that we will resend it to Mr. Yurek, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): Deputy Premier, thank you very much. Chair of Cabinet. I was trying to think of all of the titles. Thank you very much. I hope it goes to all offices so that everyone has a copy of the same information.

Further questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting to listen to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. This is a bill that has been a long time in coming. It didn't come here easily, and it didn't come here without a ton of work, but yet, as he said, did we get it exactly perfect? I would say that there's room for improvement. The tone of the presentation made me a little bit nervous that there could be some reluctance to finally give the LGBTQ community the opportunity to be the parents of their own children and do away with this legal process where they have to adopt their own children, which is completely stupid and leads to a whole lot of problems or possibilities of problems—some of them have come true for some couples.

1430

Do we, on this side of the House, want same-sex couples to be recognized as parents for their children? Absolutely. Do I want this to happen, the sooner the better? Yes, absolutely. But at the same time, I realize that we have a job to do. When we read bills and we see that those bills need to be changed, need to be amended, then we have a process that allows us to do this, and hopefully would allow us to do this fairly quickly, so that we deal with this issue in due time.

There has been, as I said, a long time before this piece of legislation was introduced by this government. It certainly has been introduced by our very able member on this side of the House, Cheri DiNovo. Now it has a chance of seeing the finish line. Let's get there quickly with a good bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bill Walker): I now return to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington for his response.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thanks to the members from Nickel Belt, High Park and Parry Sound–Muskoka, and the absence of any comment from the government. That truly was an eye-opener. I asked questions of the government. There was an opportunity for them to respond, and they chose to sit down, even though I implored them to stand up.

But first, to the member from Nickel Belt: I spoke about my concerns. There is no reluctance on the bill. There are concerns that I raised up. I think the member

from Nickel Belt knows me well enough—I speak my mind. Don't ever ascribe to me things that I didn't say. I've got enough legitimate concerns with this bill; we don't need to ascribe further ones.

But I do want to say to the member from High Park—I listened to your comments—that this bill is too important for it to become a debate of clichés. This is not cliché, this bill. This will have long-term, profound and positive consequences for many people, but we ought to, and must, look at where there will be—or will there be?—negative consequences for people. That's the role of the opposition: to hold the government to account, but to hold them to account by way of minimizing unforeseen and unintended consequences that the people of this province will have to live with and live by at the end of the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Just further to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington: I was hoping that I did address some of his concerns, but needless to say, as the member from Nickel Belt has pointed out, this will go to committee. We will hear testimony from folk at committee, and there will be a chance to go through this bill clause by clause. Some amendments are needed.

But first, I want to give some credit where credit is due, again to recognize some of the folk who are here who have worked so hard. We've got Rachel Epstein from the LGBTQ Parenting Network; Joanna Radbord, who is a lawyer and part of the charter challenge; Kirsti Mathers McHenry and Jennifer Mathers McHenry, parents of Cy and Ruby and initiators of Cy and Ruby's Act, who have been there since the beginning; and we also have a young person here, Bri Gardner from the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, a co-op student from Ursula Franklin. It's really her future that we're going to be addressing and changing.

I want to talk about the bill, of course, Bill 28, and everything that's in it. I also want to address some of the concerns of those maybe not necessarily in this chamber, but those out there in the community who might have some concerns about the contents of this bill and, for that matter, the contents of LGBTQ2S legislation generally. It would surprise no one to say that I do—and I'm sure some of us do—get hate mail around LGBTQ2S issues.

A lot of that hate mail is informed—and I'm a United Church minister, as you all know—by misreadings, I would say, of the basis for our jurisprudence system in North America, and that is our Judeo-Christian heritage. I want to talk about that a little bit because that's where the objections to this bill really come from, what we call the “texts of terror.”

I also want to talk about the bill itself and the amendments that I think are extremely important, that have to be made to really make this the bill that it should be; that is, the bill that will truly grant parents equality and children equality.

First, very quickly, the texts of terror and the misreading, because I've heard these in the same-sex debate; I

heard these when we introduced Toby's law in 2012. Again, that was a joint venture, ultimately, between the Attorney General, myself and others, and I thank him for that. It took a long time, but we got there. That added gender identity and gender expression to the Ontario Human Rights Code. Also, banning conversion therapy—that was 2015, and it went a long way to stop psychiatrists and institutions from trying to turn queer kids straight.

Behind all of this and all of the mail that we've received, we hear the same things. First of all, Genesis: "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." Guess what? God made Adam and Eve in God's image, both; both male and female in God's image. There you go. So don't ever quote that to me again, because God is clearly both male and female.

Second of all, Sodom and Gomorrah: It's a story about hospitality. It's not a story about sexuality. If it were a story about sexuality, the author would be saying, "It's okay to rape a virgin daughter, but not okay to rape strangers in your town." It's clearly not that, unless you want to abide by that. It's a story about how to treat strangers. It's a story of hospitality. So don't ever talk to me about Sodom and Gomorrah.

Don't talk to me about Leviticus. There are almost 700 scriptures in Leviticus. Some of them tell women at a certain time of the month to go live in a hut, to not eat shellfish and yes, anti-homosexuality, or whatever we think they meant by "homosexuality" back then. I don't see people outside Red Lobster with signs, protesting. And yet, it's the same weight in Leviticus, so don't talk to me about Leviticus.

Finally, if you want to talk to me about something, let's talk about the first Christian converted, who—guess what?—was an Ethiopian eunuch, was a person of colour who was trans. Let's talk about that.

Let's talk about the fact that Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. He did say something about divorce. He didn't say anything about homosexuality, but did say, "Judge not," and did say, "Love your neighbour as yourself." He didn't put qualifiers around it. There were no parentheses around that. So that's the Bible. There, in five minutes—got it. Don't talk to me about the Bible.

Second of all, there's a long history of folk who have been working for equality. That's really what we're talking about. I am both proud and humbled to have been part of that history. It makes me feel very old, but going back to 1971, the very first gay demonstration in Canada was on Parliament Hill in 1971. I was there and I want to read you what the demands were because these tie into what we're discussing today. This was 45 years ago. First of all, there's a letter, and I'll read it later if I've got time.

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There were a lot of people that were involved in writing this letter and a lot of organizations: Gay Alliance Toward Equality from Vancouver; University of Guelph Homophile Association; Toronto Gay Action—I was part of that; University of Western Ontario Homophile Asso-

ciation; University of Toronto Homophile—it's cute, "homophile," don't you think?—Association; Vancouver Gay Activist Alliance; Vancouver Gay Liberation Front; Gay Sisters; Waterloo Universities Gay Liberation Movement; and York University Homophile Association.

It announces that, on "August 28, 1971, homosexual men and women and their supporters will rally in front of Parliament Hill in support of this brief." It's signed by—I don't know what ever happened to him—my friend Brian Waite and myself in 1971.

We did—actually, I didn't make it there, but I signed on to the letter—and there were about 100 people who stood in the rain on Parliament Hill at the very first gay demonstration in Canadian history. Here are the 10 demands they made. This is 45 years ago.

By the way, a little bit of history: In 1969, that's when the first Trudeau, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, said of the government, "out of the bedrooms of the nation." But he was talking about privacy. He was talking about what you do in your bedroom, which really did not affect the lives of LGBTQ2S people very much, because the police don't usually kick in your bedroom door. It's what happens when you leave your house: That's where the law makes a difference—employment, housing etc.

The demands were these—and this was two years after that:

"(1) The removal of the nebulous terms 'gross indecency' and 'indecent act' from the Criminal Code"—they were in the Criminal Code—"and their replacement," and it goes on.

"(2) Removal of 'gross indecency' and 'buggery' as grounds for indictment as a dangerous sexual offender...." That was still in the Criminal Code.

"(3) A uniform age of consent for all female and male homosexual and heterosexual acts."

"(4) The Immigration Act be amended so as to omit all references to homosexuals and 'homosexualism.'" I didn't know there was such a term. That was the Immigration Act. You could be kept out of the country back then.

"(5) The right of equal employment and promotion at all government levels for homosexuals." It wasn't happening—certainly not.

"(6) ...in divorce cases homosexuality, per se, should not preclude the equal right of child custody." So, again, LGBTQ2S parents couldn't file for custody of their own children back then.

"(7) The right of homosexuals to serve in the Armed Forces...." We all know about that battle.

"(8) To know if it is a policy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to identify homosexuals within any area of government service and then question them...." There was really a witch hunt that was going on back then that continued on for a long time—and I'll talk about that in the case of John Damien a little later.

Here's the critical one. Number 9 of our demands back then, 45 years ago, was, "All legal rights for homosexuals which currently exist for heterosexuals." Here we are, 45 years later, and we're still not quite there yet—

certainly not until we get this bill passed in the province of Ontario and, arguably, in other provinces as well that don't have parent equality.

“(10)”—and this is really kind of full circle for me—“All public officials and law enforcement agents to employ the full force of their office to bring about changes in the negative attitudes and de facto expressions of discrimination and prejudice against homosexuals.”

Wow! That was 45 years ago. No mention, of course, of “queer” or “trans” or “two-spirited,” but it's amazing, isn't it? We've come a long way—we have. But we're not there yet. That shows, I suppose, how slowly the wheels of justice really turn.

I mentioned that I was going to talk about John Damien. He was a man who sat as a judge with the Ontario Racing Commission, and he sued his employers, who fired him because they said that because they knew he was a homosexual, he was open to blackmail. That was in the 1980s and that shows you how difficult, even 10 years after the *We Demand*, it was to be an LGBTQ2S person even in the 1980s and 1990s—we remember the bathhouse raids in 1981—how difficult it was to just exist, to just go about your life as you would.

Now we stand in a world where some 80 countries have laws against being LGBTQ2S and about 20 of them have the death penalty. I'm sorry to say that some of those countries have been incredibly influenced by those coming from this country and the United States, in terms of the way that they have written their laws. Again, without going back to the Biblical five-minute summary, a lot of those people call themselves Christian. They're not, really, but they use that term.

So here we stand looking at the latest piece of legislation that will actually go another bit of the distance to equality.

I want to talk about my family first, because the political is personal; it always is. Certainly, political is personal for LGBTQ2S people and for feminists. I knew that when I married the second time, as a bisexual woman—my partner is male, but he had never had a child. My children are grown, and I didn't want any more. He's 17 years younger than me. He wanted the experience of fatherhood. Two of our best friends who live in Ottawa, two gay women, wanted to have children. So Gil became the donor for their two girls, born on exactly the same day—miracles of modern science—a few years apart from each other. One is now a proud teenager; she's 13. The other is 10. They're wonderful children: happy, healthy and part of our family. It's great, because I don't have grandchildren, so for me they're like my grandchildren. For us, they're an extended part of our family. But there were concerns. Back then, we and their mothers were concerned about how my in-laws would react to having these grandchildren. Gil is an only child, and he grew up in a Portuguese household—he's the first generation. His parents are very Roman Catholic. Again, the only child, a son—in their house, when I met them for the first time, there were pictures of Jesus and Gil, and Jesus and Gil. We were concerned—with good

reason—we thought, about what the grandparents' reactions would be to discovering they had grandchildren. When Harriet, the eldest, got to be about one year old, one of the mothers said to us, “If we don't tell them about their grandchildren, they will go through life never experiencing grandchildren.” So we steeled ourselves—also with legal help, because this was pre-parent equality, so the mothers had to legally adopt Harriet and Stella. They had to go through the courts. They had to make it all so. They had to draw up all sorts of forms before we all came out to the grandparents—my parents long since deceased. We all came out to the Portuguese grandparents. And do you know what, Mr. Speaker? An amazing thing—quite miraculous, I think—happened: They love their grandchildren. Who knew? Grandparents loving their grandchildren—wow, strange. They love their grandchildren, the only grandchildren they will ever have, biological grandchildren. We are one big, happy family. We are a very big, happy, Canadian family. There's nothing more Canadian than our extended family, I'm proud to say.

Really, that's what this bill is about. This bill is about extending the rights of heterosexual couples to couples who are not heterosexual—and the rights of their children born to them to be the same as every other baby born to every other parent. That's what the intention of this bill is. It's hard to argue against it.

A little bit of the etiology of this bill—because it hasn't come along easily. It hasn't arisen overnight, as some would have you believe. In fact, it's been going on for a long time.

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Let's look at the history. The Ontario Court of Appeal recognized equal marriage back in 2003, but of course LGBTQ2S parents didn't have that recognition. Ontario courts have recognized that the Children's Law Reform Act and the Vital Statistics Act discriminate against LGBTQ2S families and are unconstitutional, but it's been 10 years since the courts told the government to fix the legislation. This isn't overnight. It's not even over the summer. It's not without deliberation. It's not without input. I warrant there are very few laws that we have passed in this place that have had as much input, deliberation, thought and action as this bill.

In 2006 was the Rutherford case. This is when it happened. Justice Rivard found the Ontario birth registration scheme to be discriminatory, because it eliminated non-biological lesbian co-mothers.

As I mentioned just briefly to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington, this isn't just about pieces of paper. It's not just about recognition. It is about equality, and that is important, but not just about parent equality and equality for the children; it's also about the safety of our children.

Think about this scenario. You have two mothers—and by the way, the mothers of our children, as we call them, were in this scenario for a while, until they had to go through the courts and adopt the children legally. Jodi, my friend, was not the birth mother, so Jodi, being at

home with the children while Caitlin was off at work, didn't have the right to take them to the doctor and act as their legal guardian and parent. That can be catastrophic, as you can imagine.

It's about the safety of the children. It's about the safety of the babies, that parents who are not the birth parents can look after the physical health issues of the child. They can actually keep the child alive, if necessary, with medical help. This is important. It's not just about paper. It's not just about parentage, and it's not just about equality. It's about the very well-being, the very life of these children.

Again, in 2007, there was a ruling by the Court of Appeal for Ontario that declared there is a legislative gap in the scheme for parental recognition, and that may be in a child's best interests to recognize more than two parents.

On April 8, 2016—we have those who took part here—21 LGBTQ2S families issued a charter challenge against the Ontario government to fight the discriminatory laws. The court ruled in favour of the families and ordered the government to bring in legislation by September 30, 2016. They made it just under the mark, Mr. Speaker; just in the nick of time. But it's a good thing, right? It's a good thing that this happened.

I'm going to go over some of the amendments that are absolutely essential if we're going to get this right. I've already spoken to the Attorney General. He's indicated a willingness to work with us on these and to make sure that the language gets it right because ultimately, if the bill doesn't do what it's designed to do, this is an incredible waste of time and would end up back in the courts again. None of us want that.

Here's what needs to change:

Rules of legal parentage: In cases where a child is conceived through assisted reproduction, the law—sorry, this is not what I'm looking for; I'll come back to this. Ah, here we go. Problems with the bill:

(1) The bill elevates the importance of the biological father at the expense of the birth parent—who is overwhelmingly, of course, female—and children. The focus on biology in section 7 makes a rapist a parent. I know the Attorney General doesn't want that. It's not the intent, but it could be construed that way.

It also makes it harder for a woman to give her child up for adoption, as a one-night stand, unknown father or rapist, even, would need to consent. We need to change the language there. Currently, this person—the rapist, one-night stand—who the mother doesn't choose to acknowledge has to go to court and get a declaration. They don't have automatic parental rights and therefore can't hold up a woman's decision to give her baby up for adoption.

The bill, as drafted, diminishes women's autonomy and increases the likelihood that babies will languish in foster care while “fathers” are tracked down and consent is obtained. We not only heard from the lawyers who were involved in drafting Cy and Ruby's Act about this, but we've also heard from those who are involved in the

adoption world about this. They're concerned about it. It needs to be changed.

(2) A parent who is not the birth parent but is the partner would still need to make a declaration under the current draft to get certainty. This is in section 8. It makes them a presumptive parent but puts no limits on what can rebut the presumption. The section needs to establish parentage except where a spouse doesn't consent. Same-sex parents remain second-class. That defeats, really, the purport of the bill so, again, it's something that needs changing.

(3) The section on declarations, section 13, precludes a declaration where there has been an adoption. Often, same-sex couples who adopt internationally must do a single-parent adoption. Currently, those parents can get a declaration for the second parent. Under this bill, they can't. That is a problem.

(4) The bill imposes numerous limitations on declarations for multi-parent families. I actually raised this in the debrief. The courts have determined that it could be in that particular child's best interests to have three parents. It makes the timing of the intention to parent together determinative when this may not reflect the reality of the child's parenting or the child's best interests. Instead, experienced family law judges should still have a measure of discretion so that the child's best interests could govern. Again, changes in the wording.

(5) New wills are required to capture children born using assisted reproduction if those wills were entered into before the act. The law should be applied to all instruments, whenever entered. Again, changes there.

We're hoping that after our discussion, the government will be amenable to those changes, and certainly they have indicated that they will be.

I want to read the stories of some of the amazing women who are involved in making this day happen.

First of all, Kirsti's story—she is here with us. When Kirsti Mathers McHenry's wife was in labour, the unthinkable happened—and her wife is here, too. There were complications and the doctors warned Kirsti that there was a chance that her wife could die. At that moment, holding her newborn baby, she watched doctors frantically try to save her wife's life. This is from a press clipping. It also dawned on her that she might be raising the child as a single mom. If that nightmare was not horrifying enough, Kirsti also realized she would not be a legal parent to her own child.

“As I held my wife's hand and snuck glances at the two rolls of paper unspooling and recording the two heartbeats, I went through the possibilities. If my wife died, I might not be able to leave the hospital with our baby. Who would be able to? My in-laws. They were supportive. Maybe the hospital would let the baby leave with them. Our sperm donor—he was known to us—was another possibility. Maybe he could pretend to be more than a donor uncle for a morning and get us home.”

In the end, Kirsti's wife and new baby were both fine, but the experience was traumatic and highlighted a major gap in the current system.

"My wife was okay and our daughter was okay, and we left the hospital together after visits from family. Months later, we obtained a court date and the three of us, with our lawyer, went to court to make me a legal mommy," she said.

This story has a happy ending, but the flaw in the system must be fixed. Parents should not be forced to adopt their own children.

It's a pretty dramatic example. Thank you, Kirsti and Jennifer. Applause should be given to them for being here.

Applause.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Again, this has dramatic effect and should have dramatic effect if it's done correctly.

Here's another story. Again, these are taken from press clippings. This is Raquel's story. Raquel Grand and Deanna Djos are the mothers of two children, Thora and Aloe. Deanna is the genetic mother of Thora, who was conceived with the sperm of a known donor. Raquel is the genetic mother of Aloe, who was conceived with the sperm of the same known donor. Both births were difficult, with serious medical complications.

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Raquel writes: "A short while after Thora entered the world, it became obvious that Deanna was hemorrhaging badly and her body was not responding to the care the midwives were giving her. The midwives transferred Deanna's care to the surgical team at St. Michael's Hospital. I stood at the side of the room and held onto our new daughter and watched in horror as my wife passed in and out of consciousness, trying not to notice the alarming amount of blood that was accumulating on the floor around her bed in the form of soaked rags and the panicked scramble of midwives, nurses and doctors as they tried to gain control of this unpredictable medical situation.

"I stood on the side of that room for six hours, holding the sturdy little body of our newborn baby who was full of life, as I hoped that my wife would not lose hers. More than once I realized that I might have to raise this little girl on my own. More than once, it dawned on me that I was not even Thora's legal parent, as I had yet to adopt her. Would I be able to adopt my own child if my wife died? Would I lose custody of her because I was not her biological mother? These were questions I had to consider while holding out hope that Deanna would not leave us....

"We still had to contend with the matter that Thora needed to be adopted by me and Mike had to sign his parental rights over. Despite making it through a very difficult birth, Deanna was still not well. She had lost a lot of blood and was very weak. Her iron levels were dangerously low. It was recommended she remain on bed rest, and not go anywhere that was unnecessary. However, due to the scare we had, we realized that Thora could lose both of her mothers if anything happened to Deanna. We felt it was very necessary to set up appointments with lawyers and get Thora's adoption process sorted out even though Deanna should not have been out

of bed. We spent more than a few days attending meetings and seeing lawyers for Deanna, Mike and myself. We spent thousands of dollars that should have gone into an education fund for Thora. In the end the three of us got what we wanted—I became Thora's other legal parent and Mike was able to sign over his parental rights. Slowly Deanna regained her health, and finally, we were legally a family of three."

Again, severe psychological stress in the midst of severe physical stress—again, because the law failed to recognize their parentage.

Finally, Donna's story: I'm reading these stories because we're not talking about something in the abstract. We're talking about real people—real mothers, and fathers too, and real babies—and what the current status quo means if we don't act, if we don't pass this bill with amendments. Mr. Speaker, there is no excuse for doing nothing. By the way—again, working with the government—we're hoping that babies born in the interim before this bill becomes law will also in some way be covered, because there are babies being born, and I've heard from their parents. Here is Donna's story from a *Globe and Mail* piece:

"Donna McDonagh's daughter was born in the autumn of 2006—an exciting time in the province of Ontario for lesbian couples. A law was about to change, allowing two moms to put their names directly onto a child's birth certificate. Their baby was the first in Ottawa to have a birth certificate listing two women as parents.

"Both McDonagh and her partner, K., were in their 40s when they decided to start a family, but K. had embryos that she'd created some years earlier, using her own eggs and donor sperm. McDonagh was there when the embryo was transferred into her partner's uterus, there for the doctors' appointments, the prenatal classes and the birth. Because K. was self-employed, and McDonagh was a federal government employee, McDonagh took parental leave and was the primary caregiver for most of the first 11 months of their baby's life.

"McDonagh had every reason to be confident that she was a full parent before the law. Not only was her name on the birth certificate and their child's last name a hyphenated hybrid of the two moms' surnames, but the two women had signed an order of joint custody, declaring that their intention was to be co-parents with equal say in the child's life. She was granted paid—and topped-up—parental leave. She'd successfully applied for the baby's health card and social insurance number and was named as "parent" on the application for a passport. Wills, powers of attorneys ... everything signalled the same intent, that" she "and K. would play equal roles as parents....

"I really felt that we were good," McDonagh recalls. McDonagh was aware that birth certificates were just the beginning, that there were other laws that were still awaiting revision, but she was confident that it would just be a matter of time before everything was updated as Justice Paul Rivard had said it should be in the 2006 landmark case that made the birth-certificate changes

they had taken advantage of.” She says, “I trusted in that process.”

“But in August 2009, the relationship ended. At the time of the breakup, K. agreed that there would be joint custody. But there was a loophole in one of the laws governing parentage, which could be used to cut McDonagh out.

“The law was the Children’s Law Reform Act of 1990, and the loophole was that a non-birth, non-biological parent could only be ‘presumed’ to be a parent if the person both cohabited with the birth mother and was male. McDonagh isn’t male. This detail was one of the several bits of law that Justice Rivard had indicated was in need of updating, saying that lesbian mothers were correct to argue that they shouldn’t have to ask permission to be parents of their own children.

“But those updates never happened. McDonagh’s name on the birth certificate, it turned out, meant very little....

“The two women fought it out through the courts. In the end, after more than two years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal costs, McDonagh was” finally “granted joint custody of her daughter.”

This, again, to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington’s point: If you really want to clear up the courts and the fights in courts, this equal parenting bill is absolutely critical.

I’ve gone over some of the problems. Some amendments are absolutely needed; there is no question. We’ve heard about those amendments from the stakeholders right across the spectrum, and I’m sure we will hear about them when the bill goes to committee.

That’s something that I wanted to talk about too, because there is a process in this place. Not only has this bill been waiting 10 years to get here, not only did the courts rule 10 years ago that it should happen, not only was the government given a deadline of September 30 to make it happen, hence this bill—and now here we are with all of the court documents, with all of the research that’s gone into it—but we still have time. So to those who have concerns about amendments—the amendments that I’ve already pointed out or about, quite frankly, anything else—there is a chance at committee to testify. That’s what committee is for. By all means, put your name on the list and testify at committee.

Then there’s time for clause-by-clause. That’s where the amendments come in. That is part of the process here. We will be putting forward amendments. The New Democratic Party has already listed what those amendments will be. I understand the government is in accord; hopefully they’ll put forward their own as well. The Progressive Conservative Party is welcome to put forward amendments at that time as well.

But to argue that there hasn’t been enough time spent on this bill is a bit rich. We’re talking about over a decade, and we’re talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars of legal bills and court time being taken up fighting for what we’ve got in front of us, hopefully with amendments. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of legal

bills and court hours taken up: To argue that this is going to create more court hours is a bit rich.

Finally, we’re talking about the health and well-being of children who are being born almost as we speak. We need our children to be safe—all of our children. Children with families that look different from ours: We need them to be safe too. They cannot be safe if their parents are not equal; it’s that simple. They cannot be safe if their parents are not equal.

To go over the case, again, that I made: The non-biological parent, without the thousands of dollars of legal costs and going through the courts and officially adopting their own child, would not have the right to take that child to a doctor if that child was in urgent need of medical care. That’s not safe and that’s not in the best interests of the child. I would argue that not being equal is not in the best interests of the child.

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I would argue further to that, because I’ve given you a kind of spectrum of 45 years of action on LGBTQ2S file, that when that child goes to school, if they’re not met with equality in the classroom in terms of how their families are viewed—and this is all part and parcel of what we’re talking about. Because if they’re not equal before the law, then are they equal anywhere else? It’s arguable. If they’re not equal at the time of birth, then are they really equal when they go to school, when they move through life? We’re talking about children here.

Again, we’ve all been and come a long way, I think. I was very moved by a friend of mine, Michael Coren, who wrote an article—I think it was in the Star—in response to the uproar over the sex ed curriculum and said exactly what I and others have been saying forever: that really the objection to it is homophobic and transphobic in essence, and pointed out the signs.

This was the Michael Coren whom I spent months and months debating back in the day around the issue of same-sex marriage. It would be me wearing my collar and him on opposite sides of this issue. We made the media gamut. He was adamant. He had his television show and I would be on it. He’s a constituent of mine. We would agree on many things; we disagreed on that. To see how far he’s come, to the point that he’s written a book about his conversion—because it is a conversion—and that he’s writing articles like the one I read just this morning, is to really see how far many have come in Ontario and many have come in Canada.

I get that not everybody has had the life experience I’ve had. I get that not all families have had our family’s experience, but when we talk about equality and we talk about parental equality, I think when we reach out and show people that, really, the face of this bill—it’s not the face so much of a parent; it’s the face of a child, a child who is playing, just like all of our children play, no matter what their family background, in the schoolyard. Can you really tell by looking at that child, what they say, how they play, their antics, what kind of family they come from? Whether they’ve got two moms, two dads, two moms and two dads, trans parents, straight parents,

queer parents, who cares? At the end of the day, who cares? We shouldn't care what their family looks like.

When we talk about trying to diminish the effect of bullying in our schools, how can we say that and then come here and be bullies ourselves in not supporting parent and child equality? How can we come here and say some families are more equal than others, some parents and some children have more rights than others? How can we not model what we ask our teachers and the children in our schools to model? Which is to accept and love each other the way we are. That's very simple, really. It's very simple, and there is nothing that is not in the best interests of the child in that. To argue anything else is to argue against the best interests of the child.

I've read personal stories from some amazing and remarkable activists. I have to say that the women sitting here in our galleries and many, many more out there—many more—really looking back over the decades that have brought us to this moment because we are unique in this province, and I think we have a lot to be thankful for, that we actually live in a province that's come this far—one would argue this fast; I wouldn't, because it's 45 years later—come this far on this file. But we're not there yet, and this'll put us a step closer.

Something else that's coming up: On November 20, we're going to be recognizing and having—the 21st, I think, is a Monday when the House sits—a moment of silence around trans remembrance day. We're going to be raising the flag out front, the trans flag, on trans remembrance day—the first time that's ever happened at Queen's Park. Last year, I think it was the first time the pride flag went up.

I remember when Dyke Day first started. I remember actually performing the first legalized same-sex marriage after Brent showed us you could marry by banns—not legally, but you could do it in a church. I thought, "Great; I'll do that." I married two women and sent it in. The Registrar General's office—this was back before the law changed—thought Paula and Blanca were two men's names. There's nothing about male and female on the form. They vetted it and it became de facto the first legalized same-sex marriage in North America, actually. We celebrated that by always marching on Dyke Day—them in their wedding dresses and me driving the convertible. It was fun.

It's a long history that has brought us here, a long history, and it has been a hard-won history. We've lost a lot of people in that history, and by "lost" I mean actually lost. Without going into the AIDS crisis—but there was one, and there still is, and we're still not dealing with that with any kind of equality. We still have discriminatory blood laws in this country. We still force gay men to go on ODSP just to cover their medication—that's unconscionable—in this province. We still do that. We still have work to do on that file.

We still have work to do on the trans file, where 50% live in poverty and 50% have attempted suicide. We still have work to do on that file.

But today we have a chance to do something to move us ahead, and that is, let's pass this bill. Let's get it to

committee. Let's get it looked at in committee. Let's give everybody a chance to say their piece. Let's go through it clause by clause—and we will—so that amendments can be made to make it stronger, because it needs to be stronger. It needs to be changed in some pretty important ways.

Then we will be able to say to Bri and those of her generation, their generation, that when it's time for you to have children, whatever your family looks like, you won't even remember a time when you had to go through a whole separate process just to make sure your child was recognized in law. They'll say to us, "Really? You had to do that back then? Really? You really had to do that? There was something preventing you from doing that? It was only a man and a woman?" We will seem like such dinosaurs.

So let's get out of the Jurassic age and into the present. Let's pass this, at least for second reading. Let's put it in committee. Let's recognize all of those who have gone before, all of those incredible activists, many of whom are here and many of whom we should pay tribute to for all their outrageously difficult work to get us here. We're not quite there yet, but with any luck at all, by Christmas we will be, and that will be the best gift of all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's always interesting to hear the member. I think what I heard the most there is that there are so many questions that actually need to be answered. I think that's what my colleague—I always get his riding wrong—

Interjection: Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Bill Walker: Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. I finally got it all out. I can read.

There are a lot of unanswered questions and a lot of things that we've maybe never dealt with. How do you deal with them? You don't want to get—what I find in my riding is that the people who are the most frustrated come into my office and want it clear, a black-and-white "What's the answer to this?" FRO is one of those examples that I didn't mention the last time I was able to speak to this. That's where I hear a lot of concerns. People come in and they think they understand the law, or they believe that it should be one way and yet it's not, and there's a lot of ambiguity.

This is what I think he's trying to raise here, that this should get to committee. It's interesting that the government is trying to, in many cases, ram a bill through without proper debate. I'm on record almost every time we talk that we are sent here to represent all of the people of our riding. We should be able to take something like this that is truly going to have ramifications, particularly for the families who are going to be involved, and we actually have good, solid debate and put out legislation that is well thought out, articulated, clear and understandable by all in a common manner.

1520

So if you debate that well, we should be able to find all the what-ifs. We can answer all the types of questions

that the member has raised and ensure that we have good, clear legislation, as opposed to what I see with this government. A lot of times they come out and say, "Here's what it is," and then they try to retrench it and pretend that they're actually saving the day with this legislation. They start the fire and want to come in and be the heroes with a firehose. It's not the reality.

This is one that is going to have significant ramifications. I alluded to it the last time. The courts are already backlogged. FRO is one of those organizations that are backlogged big time because of ambiguity. We don't want this piece of legislation to be the same. We want to make sure we do it right the first way. We should have more debate on it so that we do do it, and at the end of the day, the children and families truly are well served.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was very interesting to listen to my colleague from Parkdale–High Park. It really showed the genesis of the bill. This is a bill that has been a long time coming. She gave real-life stories of people who lived with the set of laws that we have now, and lived with the consequences of the set of laws that we have now, and have put their shoulder to the wheel and made sure that we were going to change.

Cheri, the member from Parkdale–High Park, had brought this bill forward as a private member's bill before, to really show that the laws as they exist do not work anymore and are not respectful of same-sex couples, as well as LGBT communities, and need to be changed. She had drafted a private member's bill and introduced it into this House so that we would move things forward. Now the government has accepted her hard work and brought a bill of their own to move forward.

All this being said, there is a process in this House that goes first reading, second reading, public consultation, clause-by-clause, and then it comes back for third reading, an opportunity to get it right. We know that the bill goes in the right direction, but it is not quite perfect yet. There are opportunities to make this bill better and make this bill stronger, so I encourage people to take part in the debate, for sure, if they have ideas as to how to make this a better bill. At the end of the day, all those children that are born, all of those families that have become parents, need us to act quickly. Let's not forget that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a great privilege for me to stand up and participate in this debate, the debate that we are having because of the incredible efforts and advocacy of my colleague the member for Parkdale–High Park. She talked in her leadoff speech on this bill, the All Parents Are Equal Act, about her past and her involvement in this issue, pushing for change since the 1970s.

As she was speaking, I was reminded of my own experience as a parent—in, I think, the year 2000, in fact. My daughter was in JK. They were doing the family unit

in the classroom, and she came home with a blackline master with little boxes for the kids in JK to fill in and it said, "My family is mother, father, sister, brother," and uncle, whatever. I just thought about the child who might have been in that class, who looked at that blackline master about a family. That child knows that they have a family, whether they have two mothers or two fathers or a mother and two fathers or a grandparent or whatever, but their family was not reflected in the kind of reality that we were trying to impose on children in our school system.

Thankfully, we have evolved a long way since 2000. This bill that we are discussing here today moves that evolution one step further, one step closer to the equality that we seek for every person in this province, every family in this province and every child in this province. Once again, I congratulate the member for what she has done to bring this issue before us today, and I look forward to the passage of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question and comment, if there is one.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm pleased to be able to lend my support to the comments made by our colleague from Parkdale–High Park on Bill 28. I really appreciate being in this Legislature on any given day, but when I have the opportunity to sit and listen and learn and appreciate from someone who brings so much experience and so many voices from others into this Legislature, I am very pleased to be able to benefit from that, and pleased that we are talking about a piece of legislation that will benefit, in a profound and immeasurable way, families and children in our province.

I am pleased to also be here as a former educator—although, on some days, we continue to educate—and to recognize that children come into our classrooms from all sorts of different kinds of homes and families. The most important thing is that the families have their support system and they love their children, that the children come to us—and whether it's from two mothers, two fathers, grandparents, an older sibling, or the foster system, they need to know that they are loved, and they need to be accepted and to have a start in the world knowing who it is who wants them and loves them and will provide for them and take care of them. What a wonderful foundation to be able to give to a child. So I'm glad that we're here speaking about that.

My brother and my brother-in-law were married in San Francisco. At that time, I had to hop on a plane and get there as fast as I could because the state government was putting a limit on how long they would be allowed to legally be considered married. I remember thinking, "My goodness, to put constraints on love and family and people willing to commit—how wrong is that?" So here we are, and we're making this right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I believe that is four questions and comments, so we return to the member for Parkdale–High Park for her reply.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for being so patient, because, as Peter Kormos

used to say, “I took the scenic route in debating this bill, not the direct one.”

I just want to return again to the folk who are sitting here and thank them for all their incredible work: Rachel Epstein; Joanna Radbord; Kirsti and Jennifer Mathers McHenry, parents of Cy and Ruby—remember, it was Cy and Ruby’s Act originally—and Bri Gardner, our co-op student who just happened to arrive for the first time today. What a great day to arrive in this place.

I want to say to my friends to the right here, both figuratively and literally, in the Progressive Conservative Party, that we have a wealth of family law sitting right here in this House today. If there are any family law questions that they have about how this will affect the courts or anything else, please feel free to give them a shout. I’m sure they’ll be happy to give you some advice. They don’t seem to be too interested, but you never know. We are here, as the member said, to educate occasionally.

Look, yes, we want to get it right. We want the amendments to be made. We have assurance, it seems, from the government that those amendments will be made, so let’s put that on record and make it very clear that that is what they’re saying. We hope that the Progressive Conservatives, after talking to all our family law experts, want to make their clause-by-clause amendments—they’re free to do that, too. But quickly—“quickly” is the operative word here. There are babies being born who will be born not to parents of equal stature as other parents, babies being born whose health will be at risk because this law will not be passed with some degree of urgency. There is a weight upon us to get this done, so let’s get it done.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is indeed a pleasure to stand in my place in this House, after all of these years, to speak about Bill 28, the All Families Are Equal Act.

1530

I was just in a meeting, actually. I had to come up very quickly because, for reasons that are not exactly clear to me, not all members are speaking to this piece of legislation. It’s been a long time coming and, while amendments are needed, it is a good piece of legislation and it needs to pass very quickly.

That said, I was meeting with a group from KAIROS who are hoping to move the conversation in this place around truth and reconciliation forward, in particular in the Ontario curriculum. I was actually bragging about the member from Parkdale–High Park and her work in this House, which has been relentless on a number of issues, including inclusionary zoning, affordable housing and stopping funding for conversion therapy for those from the LGBTQ community. This is in keeping with the pattern of the work that she has done in this place.

I did mention that there is a prayer that we say in this House every morning. To paraphrase, it says, “We should use our power for good.” If more of us did that, we would accomplish more good. It stands to reason.

So it’s a pleasure that the member from Parkdale–High Park was able to bring forward Cy and Ruby’s Act, which was Bill 137. It was her private member’s bill. I remember very clearly being out on the front lawn of this place and meeting with parents who wanted to share their stories with us.

It’s a very personal story for me, I have to tell you. My sister and her partner, when they started to try to have a family—for same-sex couples, it’s not an easy path, I have to tell you. There’s a lot of cost at stake. It’s not a journey that was, at the time—their son Leo is now 13 years old, who was here actually on the day I was sworn in, and he is my number one fan, next to all the major soccer players in the world. I’m keeping good company.

But when they were going through this journey as same-sex couples, they ran into stigma at almost every step of the way, from the hospital system to the counselling system to their employers, which were both school boards at the time, when progressive strategies and equity policies actually were not in place in those school boards. Those school boards, quite honestly, have come a long way, and I commend many of them—not all of them, but many of them—for being more inclusive of what a family needs to be.

This debate for me, though, today in this House stems from what should stimulate and motivate the conversation on Bill 28, the All Families Are Equal Act: what is in the best interests of a child. Today, Leo happens to have four mommies, so he has extra stress but extra love, I like to say. He’s indeed a very fortunate child, and he’s growing up in a world that is so different than the world that I grew up with. I would like to refer to him as a little change-maker, because he tells this story very openly, and with great pride that he has four mommies.

This bill, though, does make serious amendments to the Children’s Law Reform Act to establish new rules of parentage, ensuring equity in legislation for same-sex partners and any partners using assisted reproduction. The act aims to eliminate the distinction between the person who gives birth and the child’s other parents.

It did come as a huge surprise to me, as the aunt of my nephew Leo. My sister had given birth, and in order for her partner to have equal rights as a parent, she had to adopt Leo, which was astounding. Of course, my children who had grown up with two aunts just saw them as a family. Children have this innate quality that they just see love where love is, and they see equal parents where equal parents are.

It was quite a process. I think that, in the end, it cost about \$7,000 in legal fees for Julie’s partner to adopt Leo so that she would have equal rights as a parent in the school system, in the health care system, out in that world which is not always so accepting, as we all know.

This act was a long time coming. As I mentioned, it does make those amendments to the Children’s Law Reform Act. Related amendments are also made to the Vital Statistics Act to reflect those rules as they affect birth registrations. Of course, other complementary amendments are made to various statutes to reflect the new rules of parentage.

Even this morning, reading the Toronto Star editorial about the need to—really, it is a conversation that is happening across this province. The editorial this morning specifically had to do with children's aid societies and the need to have a race-related lens applied to the decisions that are made in that organization. Of course, they need the corresponding resources to ensure that that education and that training does, in fact, happen.

But it ultimately comes down to what makes a good parent. If you had been on the front lawn of the Legislature when gay pride month was actually announced—gay pride week, gay pride month—it was a huge celebration. All the families had come out and were part of this celebration, which was finally acknowledging them as equals. Cy and Ruby were actually there that morning and had obviously given a lot of praise to the member from Parkdale–High Park. So that's all good. The intention of the bill clearly is good. It is absolutely moving in the right direction.

There are some policy effectiveness issues that, for very good reason, we as New Democrats have some issues with, and some questions. There are parts of the bill that stakeholders are obviously not fully satisfied with because they have the lived experience of trying to navigate through these social systems—social constructs, if you will; and of course, we are going to be tabling some amendments to ensure that some of those roadblocks don't exist.

The first piece, though, is that the bill elevates the importance of the biological father at the expense of the birth parent, and those are obviously overwhelmingly women. The focus on biology in section 7 could cause some issues. It also makes it harder for a woman to give her child up for adoption, as an unknown father would need to give consent.

Secondly, a parent who is not the birth parent but is the partner would still need a declaration under the current draft to get certainty. So this is still a very subjective piece to the legislation. Section 8 makes them a presumptive parent, but puts no limits on what can rebut the presumption.

Any good piece of legislation, as you know, needs to have clarity. When there are grey areas, then there are, of course, conflicts as they relate to the law. The section needs to establish parentage except where a spouse does not consent. Same-sex parents seemingly remain second-class citizens.

I think the language that we will be putting forward and the language that the member from Parkdale–High Park will be using will make it clearer and less subjective. But there's no doubt about this. What my sister-in-law and my sister had to do was go to court and go through an adoption process, and that should never have had to happen, I think, if there was this premise of equality in the province of Ontario.

Around mixed reviews, the section on declarations also precludes a declaration on adoption. Often, same-sex couples who adopt internationally must do a single-parent adoption. Currently, those parents can get a

declaration for the second parent. Under this bill, they are not able to do so.

That does raise the bigger issue of how difficult it is to adopt a child in the province of Ontario. In our own region of Waterloo, there have been some companies, some private companies, that have actively gone into the business of trying to facilitate the process of international adoptions. In one case, criminal charges have been laid because there was a violation from a financial and an ethical perspective. So it is not the adoption sector, if you will. It is not easy in the province of Ontario to adopt a child, even though there are many loving and giving parents out there, where all constructs of families would like to adopt a child. It's a lengthy process.

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The issue of international adoptions is extra-complex because of the cost affiliated with it and because the regulations as they pertain in the current act are not very clear. This is an outstanding issue where a same-sex couple who would like to adopt internationally could only use a single parent name to do so. This sort of doubles down, for us, on what would amount to a discriminatory practice. Both parents are looking to adopt a child, and both parents should be listed as those parents, and that would be a huge improvement to Bill 28 where all parents are equal.

The bill imposes numerous limitations on declarations for multi-parent families as well. The courts have determined that it could be in that particular child's best interest to have three parents. It makes the timing of the intention to parent together determinative, when this may not reflect the reality of the child's best interest. Instead, experienced family law judges should still have a measure of discretion that the child's best interest should govern. This does play into the concerns that we heard from the PC caucus around having an onerous process for family law. Well, why don't we fix the family law system, instead of adopting or adapting this piece of legislation to accommodate a family law system which is clearly struggling, frayed and—by all accounts, including some evidence-based reports that we've heard from the Ontario advocate, for instance—not very child-friendly?

Now, there are courts across the province that are looking to actually make those Family Court systems more inclusive, more compassionate, like the Child Witness Centre in Kitchener–Waterloo, which is really looking to help make it such a traumatic experience—because it is. Going through the Family Court system is not where you think you'll end up as a child and, in many cases, it is not where you think you'll end up as a parent. So I would challenge the premise from the PC caucus that this would be onerous from the Family Court system because the Family Court system is already overwhelmed. Let's fix the Family Court system and make sure every child who enters into that system and every family that goes into that system actually does feel supported as they move forward.

We are obviously going to continue to push for quick passage of this legislation. We should, of course, be very

clear about some of the stories. When legislation comes to this place, we do have a responsibility as parliamentarians to give that legislation its due course and to speak to it from the perspective of our own lived experiences, but also those of people from our ridings.

Certainly the community from Kitchener–Waterloo is very receptive and very supportive of the work that the member from Parkdale–High Park has been doing on this file, which is essentially about equality. It's about challenging the rhetoric on equality and bringing that to a place where it is the law and it is not optional. Some of the stories that we have had the opportunity to bear witness to, some of the challenges that we've had the great misfortune to have to witness in sort of a helpless state, if you will, as the years have passed are quite heartbreaking.

When I go back to my own experience in my own family and the fact that my nephew had to be essentially adopted by his parents, I'm very supportive of the fact that that would no longer have to happen. The amendments I have mentioned that we as a party will be bringing forward should be adopted by all sides of the House, and we should definitely get this done.

There's no reason for these challenges to come into the court system, as they have for years now. We have the opportunity to do the right thing in this place, as we should. I commend the member from Parkdale–High Park for her resiliency on this file. Let's make sure that we get this piece of legislation right, going forward, and let's do good in this place.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's an honour to stand in the House this afternoon, on behalf of the fine residents in Windsor–Tecumseh, and to make remarks on this bill.

Like the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, I would like to pay tribute to the member from Parkdale–High Park, who for the past 40 years or more has been championing this cause in Ontario, throughout all of her many chores she's had over the years, be it as a minister or be it as a member of provincial Parliament.

I think it's probably 40 some years ago as well, but I remember that Beatles song "All You Need Is Love." That's all you need: love.

I suppose I'm a bit of a cliché myself when I say that some of my best friends are gay. Some of them are married, and some of them don't have the respect that they deserve. They still have to fight for their values. They have to fight for their rights. It isn't right that we have to do this.

I think Mr. Trudeau said it not that long ago, when he was naming the cabinet, that after all this is 2016—or words to that effect. We are in a modern society where our morals have evolved and our standards are higher. We expect more. We expect more from our governments, from our legislators and from our political parties. We expect leadership.

I think the member from Parkdale–High Park has certainly shown all of us the way. The member for

Kitchener–Waterloo certainly has shown us all what it really means to have loved ones that you stand with every day of your life and fight for their rights as well. So fighting for this bill is the right thing to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in this House, but today it's also a humbling experience for me.

We all fight hard for these positions to speak for the people of our home areas and the people we represent, but there's lots of things we learn in this House. This is an issue that I was totally unaware of five years ago when I was elected. It's through people who fight, like the member from Parkdale–High Park, and from people who relay their personal experiences, like the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, that we all learn and come together as legislators and make better laws for this great province of ours.

Make no mistake: This legislation started with the member from Parkdale–High Park, through her diligence and her perseverance, and the perseverance of the people she represents and the people she works with. That's why we are standing here today; make no mistake. But also, the government recognized that this legislation needed to be passed. I would also like to commend the government for actually recognizing that, taking good legislation and bringing it forward under the government banner and making our society better.

I would like to commend everyone who has been responsible for doing this, because this bill truly will make a better life for the Ontarians it impacts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Sure; why not, Mr. Speaker?

I just want to say, finally, thank you to everyone—really, everyone who is here, all the amazing women who were seminal in getting this bill to the floor. It's really not about me; I'm just the conduit.

I particularly want to give a shout-out to Cy and Ruby, because the original bill was named after Cy and Ruby. Think about their future: Cy and Ruby will grow up in a much better Ontario, in a much better world, we hope, barring—I don't want to jinx anybody—a much better Ontario because this bill will have passed. They will be able to look back through Hansard, and they will be able to read about this debate this day. They will be able to see their names, and that's a good thing. That's really a good thing.

1550

Today we're going to accomplish something. We're going to send it to committee. We're going to make the amendments that are necessary. I don't want to downplay that: There are necessary amendments. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo brought that point forward quite emphatically, and it's true.

Again, thank you also to the Attorney General for picking this up. It's not the first time we've worked

together on LGBTQ bills and it probably won't be the last.

As the first LGBTQ critic in this House, when people said, "Well, what's left to be done?" and I said, "a whole bunch," this is another example of that whole bunch. Thank you, and here's to a lovely evening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Kitchener–Waterloo can now reply.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to just remind the House—and thank you for the comments from my colleagues—that the Ontario Court of Appeal recognized equal marriage back in 2003, but LGBTQ parents did not have equal recognition. Ontario's laws did not recognize assisted reproduction and the equality rights of LGBTQ parents. It has been 10 years since the courts told the government to fix the legislation.

As early as April 8, 2016, 21 LGBTQ families issued a charter challenge against the Ontario government to fight the discriminatory laws. The court ruled in favour of the families and ordered the government to bring in legislation by September 30, 2016.

We have this history in this place. It's incumbent on us to get this done because so much time has passed. To have the courts rule that this Legislature do its job for those families to ensure that equality is a reality in the province of Ontario for all LGBTQ parents—the time is now. We need to get this done.

I'm not in the mood, necessarily, to congratulate the government for taking so long, but I will be very invested—just as the entire NDP caucus will be—in ensuring that Bill 28, the All Families Are Equal Act, 2016, passes and is workable for the people we serve here in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Naqvi has moved second reading of Bill 28, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act, the Vital Statistics Act and various other Acts respecting parentage and related registrations. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I look to the Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Agreed? Agreed.

ELECTION FINANCES STATUTE LAW
AMENDMENT ACT, 2016
LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LE FINANCEMENT ÉLECTORAL

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 29, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 2, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to election matters / Projet de loi 2, Loi visant à modifier diverses lois en ce qui a trait à des questions concernant les élections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It's a pleasure to rise in the House today and add a few comments on Bill 2 on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge. As you know, Mr. Speaker, with Bill 2 we are going to be fundamentally changing the way politics is done in Ontario.

I also wanted to say that I'll be sharing my time with the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

I wanted to spend a few moments talking about the process that has been used to get us here.

We first introduced legislation in the spring of this year that the Chief Electoral Officer called "the most significant redesign of Ontario election laws in more than 40 years."

For changes as monumental as we are considering, we need to take it to Ontarians. So we passed a motion to allow the Standing Committee on General Government to sit for four weeks over the summer and hold hearings across the province. That committee heard from Ontarians from Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Kitchener–Waterloo, London and Windsor.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all Ontarians who came out and gave their feedback on the bill. Their ideas were incorporated into amendments designed to strengthen the legislation.

So now we have a bill that I feel will remove even the perception of undue influence in our electoral and political system. The question would be, how are we doing this? Firstly, Bill 2, if passed, will lower the maximum contribution amount to \$1,200 for a nomination contestant or constituency association, \$1,200 for a candidate, and \$1,200 for a leadership contestant. That will lower the maximum contribution amount from \$33,250, under the current system, to just over \$3,600. That represents a 90% reduction.

Secondly, we're banning corporate and union donations. Too often, people hear about a donation to either the governing party or to the opposition from a corporation or a union with a stake in provincial legislation. Now, we've been quite clear on this side of the House that donations do not purchase policy decisions for our government, but nonetheless, we understand that corporate and union donations can create the perception of this influence, and they need to be removed. I think we have agreement on this point. In fact, we've heard from the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington that "getting rid of corporate and union donations—absolutely fine"; and from the member from Kitchener–Waterloo that, "We support it, a full ban on union and corporate donations." We appreciate that support, Mr. Speaker, but we do know that we need to go further.

The Premier has already directed caucus to stop hosting large-scale fundraisers where ministers interact

solely with stakeholders of their portfolio, and the Premier has required that all fundraisers be posted publicly. Sometimes we haven't seen the opposition follow the Premier's lead on this issue, but we believe, on this side of the House, that that's the type of openness and transparency that Ontarians deserve. That's why, if passed, Bill 2 would require parties to publicly post all fundraisers on their website.

In our efforts to remove the perception of undue influence, we need to recognize that there are other avenues that groups can use, including pouring millions into political advertising. That's why Bill 2 would place restrictions on third-party advertising. Now, again, to be clear, we understand that third parties have every right to advocate for their issues and generate awareness of their causes. That's why, in this legislation, we've allowed third-party advertising spending of up to \$100,000 during the 30-day writ period and up to \$600,000 for the six months preceding the writ period. We've also instituted strict anti-collusion measures to prevent third parties from getting around the rules. And now, in the spirit of fairness, we also will be capping political party spending to no more than \$1 million for the six months before an election is called.

Mr. Speaker, in just the last few moments before I hand the debate over to somebody else—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: —oh, yes, it was the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation—we'll be expanding the current restrictions that exist for non-partisan government advertising by an additional 60 days before an election is called.

1600

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: I would like to pick up where the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry left off. She referenced the additional 60 days before an election is called, the restrictions there. These restrictions make sense. They're going to create a more level playing field. That's the whole intention behind this legislation: a level playing field, where everybody has the same opportunity to get their points across and support parties of their choice and speak to the issues as they wish, within the context of these reforms.

Again, I do want to remind members that I think this is an area where we could find agreement with the opposition. In fact, the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington recently said, on the subject of third-party advertising, "We've gone significant strides in the right direction." That's in reference to the legislation. So I want to thank the member for his comments, for his interest and for his dedication to this subject in the Legislature and for his support of our initiatives.

Going further, I know that the member is interested in amendments that have been announced and will be tabled at second reading. We've already said that, in our opinion, the perception of any undue influence over politicians weakens our democracy. That's why we are

planning to take the extraordinary step of tabling amendments to ban MPPs from attending events where the explicit aim is to fundraise. We believe that our duties as legislators and as politicians don't begin when you take a seat in this House; rather, they begin the second you put your name forward. That's why we've expanded this ban to include candidates, nomination and leadership contestants and party leaders. This prohibition won't prevent people from making donations to a political party. It's our expectation that parties will still need to rely on donors, and this is a good thing. Indeed, as the honourable David Wake, the province's Integrity Commissioner, said, "Donations are important because they contribute to healthy political parties." We could not agree more. Bill 2 would simply force contestants, parties and candidates to expand their base of support to a larger number of people making smaller contributions. That's grassroots democracy in action. We think this builds a stronger democracy and a fairer democracy.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to speak about the per-vote allowance being introduced with this bill. If passed, the bill would lower the maximum amount that can be donated by 90%, ban corporate and union contributions and, with the announced amendments, it would ban MPPs from attending fundraising events. These are significant changes, and the Chief Electoral Officer recommended that if we're lowering donations, we should increase the per-vote allowance as a result. That's why we're introducing a \$2.71 per-vote allowance with this bill. This will, to an extent, connect the monetary success of a party with the political success of a party. The allowance will be reduced by 25% over the next five years and then reviewed to determine if it should continue.

Mr. Speaker, these changes will create a more level playing field. They will create a more grassroots democracy in which everyone has a fair opportunity to participate and support politicians and political initiatives of their choice.

I encourage all MPPs to support this, as I know they will.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I would like to offer my comments to the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Speaker, the reason this bill is before the House is because the government got caught. They got caught in another scandal. That's exactly what it is.

I'd like to read you a clip from an article from the *Globe and Mail*, published on March 7, 2016. It reports that one particular fundraising event that cost \$6,000 per ticket was marketed to companies operating in the energy sector as providing one-on-one access to the Premier and Minister of Energy. I'm not saying that these companies got preferential treatment, but the public perceives that they did. They do not trust this government that maybe this didn't happen.

So now we've got a bill before the House that addresses this situation that didn't really have to be here

if this hadn't happened in the first place. In fact, there are tickets up to \$10,000 to some events specific to a minister. For this government to stand up and say, "Oh, well, we need to fix this"—the only reason they needed to fix this is because they got caught at these fundraising events. That's what happened. They're the ones that handed out the cheques, not the opposition parties. They're the ones that hand out the cheques. It is perceived by the public that something phony was going on, and I would suggest that that's the reason this bill is before us right now.

I would also like to point out that former Attorney General John Gerretsen says that his staff was regularly told to go out and do fundraising events for the ministers, with a specific goal in mind.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Again, it's a pleasure to stand here and make comments on the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the member from Cambridge, and the minister of indigenous affairs and reconciliation.

The member from Cambridge invited us to follow the Premier's lead. I have to laugh at that, because it was the Premier who raised \$20 million under this scheme where cabinet ministers, according to reliable printed media, had quotas that they had to go out and raise to support the Liberal Party of Ontario. The Premier's lead was to send the ministers out and bring back bags of money to the Liberal Party so they would be in a good position to run in the next election—let alone in the last by-election of Scarborough–Rouge River, where they raised, what, 10 times more than they spent? It doesn't matter. If you were to follow the Premier's lead, once you fill your boots, once you fill your coffers, you say to everybody else: "You guys can't do this at all because I have my money. You don't need any money at all. Why would you need money to run against me? I am the rich. I am the queen. I am running the province. You don't run against me. You don't have any money to do it. I'll be here forever."

Life is sweet if I follow the Premier's lead. I will not be following the Premier's lead, thank you very much. I love cookies as much as anyone, but I don't get my hand caught in that cookie jar, which is what some of the Liberal cabinet ministers and their staff did. They were going out and dealing with people that they were actually doing business with, be it selling hydro or whatever it was, raising big sums of money.

So no. Thank you very much, Minister, but I will not be following the Premier's lead.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon. Certainly, as I listened to my colleagues, what I heard were some sensible reasons why we should move ahead on this, and that's really because what we're seeing out there in the public is people telling us that what was tolerable perhaps in the past isn't tolerable today. You bring in legislation when those points arise.

I'm hearing conspiracy theories over there. It sounded like a thriller novel from the member from Windsor there. I've said this before: I've been in politics now for 31 years, and I've met people from all three political parties and other political parties. Ideologies are different, perhaps, but I have yet to meet this conspiracy person that's doing all the bad stuff with the money. I'm talking about the Conservative Party, the New Democratic Party, our party, the Green Party—the vast majority, in fact. In all the people I've met in politics, I haven't met this bad guy yet.

What this says is that we're going to lower contribution limits. That makes sense to me, and I think there's public support for that.

1610

We're going to create a clear definition of what constitutes third-party advertising. That's something that the opposition parties have been asking for for years, I think. We're going to strengthen the limits for government advertising before an election, which makes perfect sense, so that a governing party doesn't have any unfair advantage going into an election, whether that be the Conservatives, the NDP or us. To address the issue of fundraising events, what we propose to do is sit down with all three political parties, develop a code of conduct, make sure that all the same rules apply to every MPP in the House and move forward on this.

This is an act that needs support. It's an act that, I think, is worthy of support and it's an act that has an awful a lot of public support.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I just want to reiterate some of the things that have been said here today and, in fact, what I've said here today.

One of the biggest challenges out there that we heard was that there were quotas for cabinet ministers to sell. There were exorbitant amounts of money. I'm just going to use my language. Here's what I heard in in my riding, the great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound: "What do you say, what do you pay to gain access to a Liberal cabinet minister today—\$10,000? Sold to the highest bidder. We'll take a table. We'll take two. We'll take a couple of contracts too."

Mr. Speaker, it's interesting that the great member from Wellington–Halton Hills, in 2011, introduced a piece of legislation to limit third-party advertising. My colleague from Chatham–Kent–Essex, in 2014, introduced legislation. In the fall of 2015, I introduced legislation, which every single one of people across the hall, the Liberals, voted unanimously against. Yet today they're standing up using words like "sensible reasons" and "tolerable."

I find it interesting that until the media really caught them, as my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh said, with their fingers in the cookie jar, there was nothing wrong with the system. They were gaming it just fine. They were filling the coffers as much as they could and maintaining that distinct advantage that they had as government.

I'm wondering what happened now. Is this an admission of guilt that they actually were gaming the system? Now, because the public and the media and the opposition have done such a good job, they're coming out.

I want to ask the members opposite why they voted down the Auditor General's request to reinstate oversight powers for the Auditor General. If there's nothing that they're worried about, if there's nothing that they're doing wrong, why will they not allow the Auditor General, who used to have the power to do oversight, to do it?

We had, I believe, 50-plus amendments from the PC party to actually amend this bill, to truly make it able to serve the people of Ontario. Yet there's one distinct one that Auditor General has asked for, and they've declined. It needs to be about the people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. One of the ministers can reply. I recognize the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: It just mystifies me. The opposition opposite, the PC opposition and the NDP third party, cried out for reform on election finances. Now, when this government brings in the most meaningful, the most far-reaching and the most effective campaign financing reform, they are really, really upset.

Why are they upset? They're upset because we put forward a collection of reform proposals, which we are applying to ourselves and applying them in a very strict way. Then we've said that we're applying them to ourselves and we're going to apply them to all parties in this Legislature.

Well, now, as soon as they're going to be subjected to the same strict requirements that they suggested we should apply to ourselves, guess what? They're no longer supportive of the initiative. They see plots in it and they see shortcomings in it. It's because it's going to cause the PC Party and the NDP to have to conduct their party financing under the same rules as everybody else in the House. They don't like that. I'm saying that what's good for this side of the House is good for that side of the House.

But let me just conclude, then, that I think, to use that expression, methinks the ladies opposite and gentlemen opposite protest—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 2, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to election matters. We didn't actually know we were going to be speaking to this bill but are happy to have the opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, the reason this bill is before us today is because the government got caught. They got caught. It was well-documented by Adrian Morrow in the *Globe and Mail*, in a series of articles about their cash-for-access plan they had going on. When that was exposed, all of a sudden the government had to react to it. We heard stories and read about how senior ministers had

quotas, targets—whatever you want to call it—goals of \$500,000 for senior ministers like the Minister of Finance. That's how much money they were expected to raise for the Liberal Party.

That is just not right, Mr. Speaker, because who are they going to raise the money from? Well, if you're the Minister of Finance, it's going to be all the various stakeholders that you're dealing with, the very people that you're going to be making laws with regard to; that's who you're going to raise money from. And if you don't think that these people coming to a fundraiser and, we heard, in the case of the energy sector, paying \$6,000 for a ticket. If you don't think they're going to want to have some influence over policy for paying that \$6,000, I think you have your head in the sand.

We see how in the energy sector—you read the Auditor General's report, who is non-partisan and documents how we paid \$9.2 billion more than we needed to, to get the existing renewable energy infrastructure. We overspent \$9.2 billion to some 30 companies. Well, it just so happens that those 30 companies also donated \$1.3 million to the Liberal Party. So we're getting really bad policy because this pay-for-access program has been permitted. But the reason we're debating this bill is because it was exposed what the government was doing, and it's just wrong.

In this bill it also deals with third-party advertising. We've seen in the last number of elections how there have been groups like the Working Families coalition, a group of mainly unions, that have targeted very successfully, usually, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. They have spent millions and millions and millions on negative advertising, usually making the leader out to be some terrible person and various other things. We read that the last election they spent, I believe, \$8.6 million—totally outside the election rules—strictly aimed toward defeating the PC Party and leader.

That's not a level playing field, Mr. Speaker. That is something that is being dealt with a little bit in this bill, although it was noted by some of the previous speakers that there would still be \$600,000 allowed to be spent in the six months prior to the writ, is what I believe I heard. In my opinion, that's still far too much money. If enough unions or whoever, corporations or whatever, are each spending \$600,000, it will add up to millions of dollars of advertising again. That's just too much money, too much influence being affected by special-interest groups. I don't think that's a good thing.

It was noted that one of the things they haven't done in this bill is that they aren't putting back in the oversight that the Auditor General used to have over government advertising. Because one of the things—and it was pointed out by the Auditor General—that is not the level playing field that the government is talking about is that the government has an unfair advantage.

First of all, backing up, the government passed legislation last year lowering the bar, lowering the oversight of the Auditor General over what is partisan advertising. So now the government can effectively do partisan advertis-

ing and that's outside of election rules. Well, there's only one party that's the government. So they can spend millions of dollars of taxpayers' money on ads that are partisan, and that creates an unlevel playing field.

1620

I believe the auditor pointed out that, in her opinion, the ads run by the government to do with climate change featuring Dr. David Suzuki were partisan because they weren't talking about a specific bill at all. So that was a demonstration—and I believe she gave other demonstrations—of how the government is doing partisan advertising. That is not being changed in this bill. In fact, as I mentioned, the government went out of their way to pass legislation to give themselves an unfair advantage in an election. I think that's a bad thing.

The idea that the government suddenly decided that MPPs shouldn't be able to do any fundraising: I think this is absolutely ridiculous. It's trying to make it look like individual MPPs are somehow the same as a minister holding a \$1,000-per-person fundraiser with stakeholders. The idea that an MPP holding some chicken barbecue in their riding for whatever—in my case, I do one fundraiser a year in the riding. It's a golf tournament. Over four years, it raises enough money to pay for a provincial election campaign, which is not a lot of money, in the grand scheme of things, for individual MPPs. Somehow saying that that's like selling access is ridiculous. I think it hurts. It hurts the riding associations. It hurts democracy, really, because I don't think anyone going to those dinners—they may be supporters, but I don't feel like they're buying influence of any kind. They're just being supportive. It's raising a bit of money for a riding association so that members can buy signs and spend the little bit of money that's required for an MPP to run an election campaign. I see absolutely nothing wrong with that. Banning candidates from participating is going to be bad for democracy.

I do believe, when you look at the United States—I think they really need rules there regarding spending in elections. If you're a senator there, it's hundreds of millions of dollars. If you're running to be President, it's billions of dollars. You kind of see the result you get down there. I think that's one of the basic things wrong with the US system that needs to be cleaned up.

But here, for individual MPPs doing very minor fundraising—I think it's a good thing in Ontario that you don't have to be wealthy to be able to be an MPP. When I look back at my initial nomination meeting, I might have spent a few hundred dollars printing up a brochure to run to be the PC—to win the nomination. I didn't have to fork over any money to run in the provincial election that ensued after that. With the current rules, it's reasonably easy, with a bit of work over four years, for an MPP to be able to raise some money. I think that part of the system is just fine.

I do think it's wrong that the leaders of political parties, under our current system, have to spend so much time doing fundraising for the benefit of their individual political party. Whether the answer to that is a subsidy I

think is something that's up for debate, and it would probably be something that the people of this province would want to have some say over. I know the government is proposing—I believe it's \$2; I heard \$2.71 per vote, which, in some of the articles I read, would mean that the Liberal Party would get something like over \$4 million a year, the PCs over \$3 million, the Green Party \$550,000. I am not sure what the NDP would get based on the last election.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: More than the Greens but less than the Tories.

Mr. Norm Miller: I heard a comment from one of my colleague in the back.

I'm not sure whether that's the best answer or not. I think that's something that's up for debate. I hope that this bill is actually going to go committee because people might have some fairly strong feelings that they don't think that should be the answer. Moving to more individual, small donors may be the answer. Perhaps limits on what parties can spend in elections is part of the answer.

But, Mr. Speaker, this bill was brought about because the government was caught with a system of selling access to their ministers, and that's why we're debating it. Now they're trying to colour that with this ban on MPPs doing any fundraising. It's just not the same thing.

I'm pleased to have had the opportunity to speak for a few minutes on Bill 2.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: For the benefit of the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, the breakdown would be—I think the New Democrats would get \$3 million, the Conservatives would get \$4 million and the Liberals would get \$5 million to run in the next election.

Mr. Norm Miller: Okay. They revised the numbers up.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yes, just rounding them up.

I give benefit and credit to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for really telling us what this bill is about. It's one of those Liberal smoke-and-mirror bills. It gives the Liberal government an opportunity to change the channel. When the rest of Ontario is talking about cash-for-access or talking about quota systems on ministers for fundraising, that's really negative publicity. They don't know how to handle that, except they have some very good public relations and marketing people who say, "You have absolutely no defence on this, but if you throw up some smoke and mirrors, we'll get everybody talking about banning MPPs from holding spaghetti dinners or little raffles in a church basement or a Legion hall." That's what people are talking about, because the Liberals are so good at changing the channel. They have this smoke-and-mirrors system.

We should be talking about their conflict of interest, where their cabinet ministers bring in their stakeholders and say, "Come meet the Premier, come meet me and bring your \$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000 or \$20,000 with you and we'll have a good discussion." Then, if you leave

and go away and make a lot of money or if you're a Liberal supporter, say, in Waterloo and you host a big fundraiser in your home and a couple of months later you're appointed to a big government position, a well-paying government appointment position, then there's nothing wrong with that, except that's benefitting the friends of the Liberal Party. We won't talk about that. We'll talk about MPPs holding fundraisers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Kitchener—Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Speaker. We'll get you to visit someday and maybe give you the keys to the city and you'll remember the name of the town.

I'm very pleased to join the discussion today on the issue of the election financing act. I have spoken about this before in the past, and just to make a few points for members on the other side of the House and for people who are watching at home: Throughout this process, we've been talking about changing the way that we do politics in Ontario, and we are committed to this. The bill that we are proposing is going to ban corporate and union donations entirely. There are some companies and some unions who have a vested interest in approaching government or the opposition, and we see the need to ban that kind of donation entirely.

Over the summer, we did hear from opposition parties, experts and the general public on how we could improve the bill. One of the things that we will be advancing is lowering contribution limits even further. The limit is going to be \$1,200. We want to create clear definitions on third-party advertising, so that lobby groups, unions and self-interested groups are going to have some boundaries. And we want to strengthen the limit for government advertising before an election.

You can look to the federal Conservatives when Mr. Harper was in power. He was quite good at doing this. He had attack ads on Stéphane Dion and Michael Ignatieff where he tried to characterize them a certain way and persuade voters to vote a certain way. He tried to do this with Justin Trudeau two years in advance of the election, but it backfired on him.

We have a number of reforms that we are bringing forward. I know the opposition has tried to argue in favour of stricter rules for fundraising, and here we are: We are delivering a very comprehensive set of new rules. But now, suddenly, they're digging in their heels and they don't want to see these reforms.

We do want to change the channel, as my opposition friend has said—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Clearly, big money has far too much influence on elections, and it's been going on for years and years, not just as recently as March of this past year, when the Toronto Star did a series of articles. Serious allegations have been raised and been documented as to the conduct of this Ontario government and the perception that it has turned government business into

a money-making machine for political gain. South of the border, it's known as pay-to-play.

1630

Two years ago, I drafted a proposal to limit corporate and union donations to political parties. I did receive feedback. I actually found myself about as popular as a snake at a garden party at that time. But the climate has changed, given the evidence that has come forward. At the time, many people in the business felt that a restriction on donations would severely underfund the process, a process with multi-millions of dollars involved in not only political lobbying, but advertising and influence-peddling.

I have a position that the collusion of government and big money unfortunately has been skewing public policy. It skews the political decision-making process. Essentially, it subverts and corrupts our cherished and long tradition of democracy, where a person's vote is what counts, not the size of their pocketbooks. We now have, really, a climate of cynicism and distrust at what is seen as a rigged system, bought and paid for by big unions, big corporations and other special-interest groups, and it puts us as politicians in the position of being puppets in this process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The member from Parry Sound—Muskoka was very effective in communicating the frustration that we all feel at this process. I think it's important to remember that the amendments that the opposition parties brought forward, in particular the ones that I brought forward on behalf of Andrea Horwath and the NDP, had to do with improving and strengthening conflict-of-interest rules. If you are the Minister of Energy and you find yourself in a room with six of the financial companies that are going to be bidding on the sell-off of Hydro One, if you can't naturally come to the conclusion that that's a conflict of interest, then the Integrity Commissioner needs to be strengthened in his role as an independent officer and that law needs to be applied in that instance. But, of course, the Liberals fought that down.

We brought forward amendments around government advertising. The Auditor General, interestingly enough, is in the midst of a huge fight right now with the Treasury Board just to do her job—to do her job on government advertising. She actually said that right now her powers are a joke in the province of Ontario. That is how ineffective the Government Advertising Act is as well.

To hear the members talk about this grand bill—let's be clear for the people of this province. We do not have the full bill in front of us. We do not have the amendments that the Attorney General has said will be transformative, which will change and strengthen oversight around election financing. They don't even have enough respect for the people of this place, their fellow colleagues, but never mind; they don't have enough respect for the people of this province to honour what we heard all summer long, where the people of this province see

very clearly their hydro bill, which is exorbitant and which is growing, and the way that this government has conducted themselves. If the Liberals don't see it, the people of this province do, and they will remember it. Mark my words, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for questions and comments for this round. The member for Parry Sound—Muskoka can reply.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes to respond. I thank the member from Windsor—Tecumseh for his comments and correcting me about the subsidy amounts. I believe the government had an initial amount, and then they increased that amount to a higher amount.

On that issue, though, I would also bring up the point of what happens to the riding associations and that local control of money for elections if this subsidy just goes to the central party. Will individual ridings have any dollars at all when it comes to being able to run an effective election campaign? I think that's a valid point to consider.

The member also pointed out how the government is so good at the smoke-and-mirrors game, how they bring up this idea that somehow MPPs doing chicken dinners is a bad thing, to try to change the argument a bit.

The member from Kitchener Centre did a very good job reading the government's talking points. This summer, there was a committee that did a lot of work, but then the government went on to ignore all the people who took the time to come before the committee. That was borne out by the member from Kitchener—Waterloo, who was involved with that and talked about the fact that there were a lot of amendments put forward to strengthen the bill by the opposition parties, and they were essentially ignored.

She also talked about the Auditor General and the fact that the ability of the Auditor General to do her job has been weakened: how the government has changed the rules to do with government advertising, essentially allowing the government to do partisan advertising paid for by taxpayers, creating an unlevel playing field in the province of Ontario.

I know the member from Haldimand-Norfolk is going to have an opportunity to speak further on this bill in a little while. We look forward to his full speech in no time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? I'm pleased to recognize the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming—Cochrane, although I have to say that a lot of the residents of Timiskaming—Cochrane aren't really interested in Bill 2, the Election Finances Statute Law Amendment Act. They should be. But a lot of people in their daily lives really aren't interested. They should be, but they aren't. When they listen, they hear political types talking about how one side or the other side is doing things wrong.

Really, what election financing is—I had a crash course in election financing, because after the party I belong to convinced me to run, I realized that we had to raise money.

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, you know what? You have to raise money in a local campaign for signs; for radio advertising; a campaign office—you know the campaign office? That costs money. Printing brochures, printing door-knocking material—that all costs money.

I know that in my personal experience the first people I went to were family and friends. Family and friends got sick of me rather quickly—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Did they give you some money?

Mr. John Vanthof: I raised some money. That's the grassroots part of politics: Everyone has to fundraise. Let's make this clear: I think everyone in this House would agree that the more we can take the big donors out of the equation, the better it is for grassroots politics. I don't think anyone is going to disagree with that.

Why this bill originated is because there were several stories in the media—specifically in the Star, and I believe the Globe and Mail as well—that painted fundraising in a much more, I'd say, sinister picture, specifically for the government of day, where it was stated that ministers had fundraising quotas for the party. A lot of people would say “cash-for-access.” That was insinuated. That was stated in the media. It's one thing to have to raise money to fund your local campaign or even fund the central campaign, but you get into a really grey area when ministers, because of their position, have to raise large amounts of money.

Part of the issue about conflict of interest is that if it could be perceived as a conflict of interest, it is a conflict of interest. I remember that from when I started on municipal council: A big part of conflict of interest is the perception of conflict of interest.

I didn't have much time to prepare for this speech, but one of the issues was when the government said they were going to sell Hydro One. The Minister of Energy and, I believe, the Minister of Finance found themselves in a fundraising position with groups of people who could be perceived as a conflict of interest. That's where this legislation came from.

There are some good things in this legislation, but there are some red herrings and, I would say, Trojan Horses in this one—big time. I don't know how to describe this one, but in the five years I've been here, the way the legislation works—you do second reading and then all parties put in amendments. We are told, on this legislation, that there are going to be big changes coming, but no, we're not going to debate them in this reading, which leads you to the question of, why are we actually debating this legislation? If the government has announced that there are going to be big changes, you would think that it would be better if these big changes were included in the legislation and then these changes had the possibility of being amended—and that muddies

the debate arena even further. I know one of the members from the official opposition brought this up to the Speaker. It wasn't successful, and we supported it.

1640

This issue is already so fraught with the perception of conflict of interest that making it even more difficult to understand certainly doesn't help the people and it certainly doesn't help the democratic process.

One of the things I find the most egregious about this one is the limits on third-party advertising. I could live with that if the government was also under the same constraints. I have a problem—and I think we all know the Auditor General has a problem—with a lot of government advertising. I don't mind when the government advertises a program: "Here's how you access the program." The improved rural rebate for delivery charges—if an ad came on saying, "Here is who is going to qualify," that is something that the government should do. That would be good. But that's not the kind of advertising that we see. A good example is, a little while ago there were ads about how the government is improving your ability to collect a pension, but that was after their own legislation was pulled. They're discussing with the federal government, yet the government is spending taxpayers' money saying they're doing a good job on the pension issue. That, to me and to my colleagues, is very, very partisan advertising. It doesn't pass the smell test. It's the same as the perceived conflict of interest.

If you will hearken back, remember there was another government ad—pension ads stick in my—

Ms. Catherine Fife: Climate change.

Mr. John Vanthof: Climate change.

But remember the pension ad where the guy was jumping across the stream—again, was that actually to inform people of the legislation, or was that to inform people how great a job the government said it was doing? There are two distinct issues there, and I think that's one of the issues where this government is trying to stack the deck. I don't know how else to describe it.

Families with kids with autism: By the time the election rolls around, as an example, they might still not be able to access the services they deserve. They won't be able to launch a campaign within, I believe, six months of the election, yet the government could put out a campaign at the same time about how they've improved autism services. That doesn't pass the smell test. That's a huge problem.

Getting back to the cash-for-access problem with the ministers: That's a very serious problem. Instead of actually addressing that problem, they have said, I believe, in a press release—because it isn't in the actual legislation—that the best thing to do is to ban all MPPs from attending fundraisers, and including, I believe, candidates from attending nomination meetings. To the people on the outside, that sounds like big stuff, but there's a difference between the Minister of Energy and the Minister of Finance attending a fundraiser for thousands of dollars apiece with banking executives whose companies could conceivably benefit greatly from the sale of Hydro

One compared to having a backyard barbecue with 200 people at \$30 a plate. To paint that all with the same brush, not only is it—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Reprehensible.

Mr. John Vanthof: Reprehensible—that's too big a word for me. But not only is it hurting—it's even hurting grassroots politics. The part about grassroots politics is to be able to have people who believe they can help and have them be able to raise money and run against someone who is established. Under this new proposed system, that won't be possible, and that, Speaker, is a travesty.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Over the summer, I had the opportunity to sit on our general government committee and I listened to what the two members here have said today. I want to say that the changes that we're proposing to go forward as of January 1, 2017, are the right thing to do, from what the deputants said. We have taken it under consideration and we want to make this the most transparent way of fundraising for everybody.

Our goal is to change the way that politics is done here in Ontario. Respecting what everybody else has to say, I think it's important that we recognize that our fundraising laws needed to be changed, whether they be around third-party advertising or whether they be around the way that we do our fundraising—the barbecues that you're talking about or the bigger fundraisers. We want to make sure that everything is transparent. We want to make sure that everybody is playing on an even playing field so that everybody has equal opportunities, whether they be in the governing party or the other two parties.

All of the deputants who we heard from over the summer told us the same thing: They wanted to ensure that we had lower spending limits so that it was easier for everyone. They talked a lot about third-party spending and third-party advertising leading up to an election, and how much they could spend and how much other parties could spend on that third-party advertising.

It's important that we looked at all these things and it's important that we found ways to limit these things so that we all were able to move forward in a transparent way and we are all able to have those equal opportunities. We were able to host our fundraisers—not host our fundraisers, not be at our fundraisers when they're explicitly fundraising events, but we had ways where the fundraising was fair.

I want to say that the Premier has directed all of us to go about fundraising in a more transparent way, and I'm proud to say that all of our members have been following through on that. We look forward to the other parties following through on it as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It is a pleasure to speak to this bill. I would say it's a pleasant surprise to see the refreshing tone of this bill to take control of political fundraising to fund parties. Too often, we get caught up in the

business of politics being too much spent on thinking about fundraising and the money becomes the dominant feature or the dominant attraction.

It pleases me and it pleases our party to see the government wanting to put restrictions and controls on fundraising with the intention that all parties are treated equally and have equal opportunity to do fundraising, and to reduce the amounts of money that can be donated, and especially, I would say, the part about third-party fundraising, which was a very one-sided thing in recent elections that favoured one party in particular. We won't mention anybody's names, but it was very unfair and there were no limits on that kind of thing. This places very real limits, which will take away the incentive or the ability of third parties to have a major effect on elections, which is what has happened in the last few elections. We very much look forward to that.

We know that some of the details of this legislation haven't been finalized yet. There may be amendments that come forward. We're very much hoping that what we see in the papers before us now is what we get: that third-party fundraising will be controlled, limited and small; that fundraising for the parties from individuals and corporations will be limited; and that we get back to the business of thinking about what politicians should be doing, which is, "How do we help people?" versus spending so much time thinking about fundraising. What happened recently with the government giving quotas to ministers to fundraise is something that we all find unpalatable, and it has to stop.

1650

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to first talk about the limit on advertising. First of all, the government will continue to advertise what they did in Ontario and what programs are available. That's indirectly influencing the population by what this government is doing, because I think most people in the province would be aware that at the time, it was a Liberal government—up until the election, it's still a Liberal government, so I'm assuming they would know that the advertising is coming from them about all the good things they're doing for the people of Ontario, with no mention of the opposition parties, of course.

A real part of this, which hasn't come up yet, which I find is going to be challenged under the Constitution of our country and human rights—I don't know any country that's called a democracy where you can ban somebody from going to a fundraiser, whether it be an MPP, a leadership candidate or anyone else.

As far as I'm concerned, I'm offended by that. No one is going to tell me where I can go, who I can donate my personal money to, when I can show up, when I can leave. Speaker, is this Moscow or Peking, or is this Canada? It is outrageous. When I tell some of my American friends about this, it gives them something to laugh about, even though we're laughing at them most of the time with the leadership that's going on there. It's a joke.

There's no possible way they'll be able to enforce that. What are you going to do—have the police follow the

candidates and MPPs around to see if they went to a fundraiser or they're at a friend's? It's impossible. It's an absolutely ridiculous proposal.

Trust me, Speaker: If they go down that road, it's going to be a slippery slope to nowhere, because that is not going to happen, I don't think, in Canada. God forbid if it does.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me and giving me the opportunity to speak in response to my good friend from Timiskaming—Cochrane.

I just wanted to note at the outset that the member started by commenting about another member speaking from their talking points, and then he reverted to his own talking points from his party. That's fine. I understand that. We all play that game. But I just wanted to put that on record: that he was very good to sticking to the NDP's talking points.

I noticed that part of the NDP talking points—I find it very amusing in this case—is how they only do fundraisers in basements of churches, and they're just doing \$10, \$15 spaghetti dinners, and dollar by dollar, they raise enough money to do campaigns, but they forget about the \$600 Barberian's dinners that they do in downtown Toronto. I don't even know where Barberian's is—I've never been to one—if you would ask me to go.

But they do it, or their leader does \$10,000, \$15,000-per-table events. I'm sure the social justice base that they call their base are not the ones really showing up to those dinners. So I just wanted to raise that as a second point.

The third point that I wanted to raise is that I'm finding this debate quite interesting because, up to three weeks ago, there was a problem that we had to solve. We had a problem that all these fundraising events were being used to influence people. But all of a sudden, now when the government says, "Okay, if you think there is a problem, that there's a perception of conflict, let's make sure that nobody can attend fundraisers," now there's no problem, and now it's anti-democratic.

Well, folks, you've got to pick a lane here. The opposition parties, all of a sudden, just flipped. They just flipped. Let's be absolutely clear—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I apologize for interrupting the Attorney General. I would ask the opposition members to please come to order. I have to be able to hear him and I can't, and he's that close.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to be able to hear him. He's got the floor.

The Attorney General—and I'll give you extra time.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

I just want to make the point that if we believe in strengthening democracy and we feel that we need to make sure that there is no actual conflict and there's not even a perception of conflict, then what the government

is proposing in terms of making sure that members are unable to attend fundraisers is the right approach. I hope that all members will support Bill 2.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now return to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane for his reply.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the members from Brampton–Springdale, Carleton–Mississippi Mills and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, as well as the Attorney General.

I'm going to use talking points from the Globe and Mail from their editorial on September 1:

"It will probably take a crew of 10 people working for a solid week to remove the skid marks at Queen's Park caused by the Wynne government's sudden U-turn on the issue of cash-for-access political fundraisers...."

"The cash-for-access scheme was a clear conflict of interest, to the point that at least one former Liberal cabinet minister said he left politics because of it...."

"It's a move that looks less like the zeal of a convert, and more like a petulant act of spite...."

"The scandal that forced the Liberals to introduce Bill 201 was not about a local MPP attending a potluck dinner in their riding, where tickets cost \$50. The scandal was the Liberals using their advantage as the governing party to collect large cheques from people seeking favour with cabinet members. It was cabinet members trading access for cash, or giving the appearance of doing so."

"Do the Liberals now expect anyone to believe that, just because a cabinet minister can't attend a fundraiser, he or she won't be beholden to major donors?"

"But instead of seeking to focus attention on a demonstrably real problem, Mr. Naqvi is suggesting a blanket ban on MPPs being physically present at fundraising events."

There is a difference between a minister attending a specific fundraiser with stakeholders within his ministry and a minister attending a fundraiser in his riding with his constituents. I truly believe there is a difference there. That's me saying it. I think that's a minister acting in his role as an MPP. There's a difference. If you can't see it, then the government has got a big problem.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It gives me great pleasure to once again stand in this chamber and speak on behalf of the citizens of Kingston and the Islands—the best riding in this province, I might add.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: No, no, no.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Oh, sorry.

It really is a pleasure for me to speak on this bill. I know it's a difficult bill for a number of MPPs. I think it's really important to talk about a point that I made the last time I discussed the bill, about the term—the opposition-contrived slogan—"cash for access." I'm going to reiterate what I said again about that term. I think the term might be legitimate if we didn't have meetings with stakeholders all the time, if MPPs didn't have meetings with stakeholders constantly. We all do;

all ministers do. We don't charge for having appointments with stakeholders, so I think that it's unfair to say that it's cash-for-access if we have a fundraiser, but if you have a fundraiser it's called something different. The fact is that we all have fundraisers. We need to have fundraisers in order to be able to run an election campaign. I'm not quite sure why when Liberals fundraise it's called for "cash for access" and for the opposition it's called something else.

I also want to make sure that I have it on record that this is not about banning family barbecues or barbecues in people's backyards. It is not about that at all. MPPs will be able to have barbecues on a cost-recovery basis. It will mean that we will be more obliged to build relationships with our stakeholders, and more people will be able to come. Imagine; it's going to be fantastic. It will be by the virtue of either the excellence of our barbecuing prowess or our ability to develop those positive relationships that will guide how much we're able to fundraise in the future.

I do just want to reiterate a few positive points about this bill. The impetus is on us to do the right thing. We are going to change the way politics is done in Ontario, but the opposition isn't happy. That's why the Premier directed caucus to stop hosting large-scale fundraisers where ministers interacted solely with stakeholders within their portfolio. This is an important change that we need to make sure that we continue to work on.

1700

We brought forward a bill that banned corporate donations entirely. This is not unlike what the federal government has done a few years ago, and it hasn't ended the federal parties' abilities to fundraise. They have continued to run in elections without difficulty.

Over the summer months, it is well known that we had a number of consultations with the public and with opposition parties. We travelled across the province to get as much information as possible. As a result, we brought forward comprehensive amendments that included lowering contribution limits. It included creating a clear definition of third-party advertising, which is very important. It also included strengthening the limits for government advertising before an election. These are fair principles; they're just principles. I think that we need to focus on the positive things. We need to be able to work together.

To address the issues of fundraising events, we proposed working with all political parties. We did do that in our travels in the province over the summer, and we developed a code of conduct.

That's why we think it's very important to bring forward an amendment to ban fundraising events for all MPPs, candidates, party leaders, nomination contestants and leadership contestants. There were no amendments before the committee that went as far as we need to go on this issue.

Rules on fundraising should apply equally to all parties. It really is very important that we come together and we all have the same rules to abide by. We need to

be able to raise money for elections, but we need to be able to do it in a way that does not prevent access.

Interjection.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Oh, sorry; I'm sharing my time with the MPP for Etobicoke Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry; you sat down and you did not indicate you were sharing your time, so I have to ask for questions and comments.

Questions and comments.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm happy to rise to add my comments to Bill 2. I agree wholeheartedly with what the member and my seatmate from Parry Sound–Muskoka said earlier: The only reason that this bill came forward is that the government got caught. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, this would never have come forward if they hadn't gotten caught.

I wanted to highlight just a couple of things, to speak to some of the problems this government has created. One—and our leader highlighted it again today in question period—is that the Liberal Party received \$1.3 million in donations from wind companies. All of the wind companies that donated got contracts. What that's done to the people in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex is to pit community against community, neighbour against neighbour, family members against family members, with the awarding of these contracts. Most importantly, and most negatively, it's affected the cost of hydro bills.

I think it's pretty clear now in Ontario that the reason why hydro bills are going up is because of these renewable contracts. To see the Liberal Party being rewarded financially and the people in my riding and across the province paying for that is an absolute disgrace, Mr. Speaker. It's why our party has called for a public inquiry into the awarding of these contracts and seeing how the donations have impacted these.

With the 20 seconds I have left, I just want to raise an issue again that speaks to Bill 2. I want to ask the government why they're not releasing and making public all the grants that they have given to private corporations since they have been in office. What are they hiding? They hand out \$5 billion a year to private companies and they continue to refuse to release this information to taxpayers in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The government House leader has encouraged us to read speaking notes, so I will. I will refer to the Globe and Mail's Konrad Yakabuski:

"The average MPP holding a \$100-a-ticket potluck has little direct power, and those who attend such events know it. They are there to support an individual and his or her agenda in an entirely legitimate manifestation of the democratic process. When the energy minister invites a few electricity-sector executives to a private dinner in exchange for thousands of dollars in donations, however, you know said executives don't show up to talk about the weather.

"Everything about the Wynne government's handling of the cash-for-access scandal reveals its true colours.

Elected on the strength of what Ontarians believed to be her honest and consensual approach, she has shown herself to be a political operator willing to go head-to-head in subterfuge, favouritism and manipulation with the best of them....

"In fact, cash-for-access as the Liberals practised it was a relatively new fundraising tactic, one they milked to the maximum....

"The Wynne Liberals acted arrogantly in first insisting there was nothing unseemly about their shakedowns. Now, they're trying to equate them with backyard barbecues of a low-ranking backbencher. With the Liberals, it seems one sophism just begets another."

Speaker, I love speaking notes; I like to make reference to them from time to time, and, when the minister challenges us to use them, I think it's only fair and democratic that they be used—because no one is hiding anything here. The people of Ontario know what's going on. This is about hiding the cash-for-access and blaming MPP fundraisers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's a privilege to speak to this bill—

Applause.

Mr. Yvan Baker: —and it's a privilege to be applauded by the member opposite from the NDP caucus. It doesn't happen often.

This bill, to me, is really about how we go about the business of serving the people of Ontario. Very often we focus our attention in legislation on the issues that touch people directly, and so we should, but this is important because it's really about making sure that there's not a perception—nor is there the substance, of course—of undue influence.

This is a bill that proposes a number of changes that I think are positive. I'll focus on a few.

Lowering the contribution limits even further: I think that actually makes a lot of sense

Creating a clear definition of third-party advertising: I think that's really, really important so there aren't loopholes or other ways for people to contribute that go beyond the contribution limits; and

Strengthening limits for government advertising before an election: That's a way of holding the government of the day accountable—in this case, our party—on advertising and making sure it's not partisan in the lead-up to an election.

I find it a little surprising that the members opposite were so critical of the way in which the Premier and ministers have raised money when, in fact, they have been doing the same thing. I find it absolutely shocking that, now that rules are being put in place to address what they were so critical of, suddenly what's good for the goose is not good for the gander.

From my perspective, I think that it's about time that the opposition stood up, supported this bill and realized that these changes that I just talked about—lowering contribution limits, creating a clear definition of third-

party advertising and strengthening limits for government advertising before an election—are steps that help make the way we do business that much better and, therefore, the way we serve the people of Ontario that much better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: If the member opposite wants to talk about geese, their goose is cooked on this one, because—

Mr. Bill Walker: Oh, well done.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you.

The only reason this bill is before us is because the government got caught. Any time that you sell tickets that are worth up to \$10,000 to meet a certain specific minister and the Premier, the public's perception is that there could be a conflict of interest. That's what this is about all.

You know, Speaker, we should be talking about the hardship that Ontarians are facing right now. Hydro rates, certainly, is top of the list. In my critic role with community and social services, we have children with developmental disabilities who, when they hit 18, get cut off of some of their funding. They have to reapply for some more, and it takes a lot of time to do that. That child only got older. That child, in most cases, hasn't changed a lot. They have to prove all over again why they need more money to help them with their lives. This is ridiculous.

1710

Instead, we're talking about a bill, which I understand isn't really before us—the whole bill isn't—that has been brought before this House because the government got caught, as we have said previously, with their hands in the cookie jar. Now, they're trying to make the people of Ontario, if they're listening to this debate at all, think that they have seen the light and they're going to change things for the better. The changes they have proposed to make, cutting MPPs out of \$30 and \$50 fundraisers, certainly is not what's needed here. What's needed is that the people of Ontario, in order to get confidence back into the government, need to have some changes that don't include that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Kingston and the Islands can reply.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to thank the speakers who have come forward: the MPP for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, the MPP for Windsor, the MPP for Etobicoke Centre and the MPP for Perth–Wellington.

I do think that one of the things that my colleague from Etobicoke Centre said is very true: that this is really about how we represent our constituents in our ridings. It is important for our constituents to have access, and having fundraisers or having events where it is a cost-recovery basis I think is going to allow a lot more people to engage with us. If some choose, after the fact, to contribute financially, that's great. If not, that's great as well.

I think it is going to be incumbent upon us, as MPPs, to develop those healthy relationships to make sure that we hear concerns from constituents in our ridings from across the province. I don't think that we need to be afraid of change. I think that it's important to make change. As we see, it is necessary.

As we go along in this process, it's really important that we do continue to engage. We will adapt to the changes that are before us. I think that the Premier was correct in identifying that we need to ban large corporate donations and union donations. It is going to be important to make sure that more people have an opportunity to engage with us in all different kinds of events. We're not proposing that that stop, but those events will be on a cost-recovery basis, and then it's up to the individual.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: As we know, we have what seems to be a partially written piece of proposed legislation before us, Bill 2, legislation that addresses election finances. It's another rewritten version. It arrived right after prorogation. It arrived right after polling data that put this governing party and the Premier right down in the basement, as far as popularity, really, across the province.

With respect to election finances, we all run locally in elections. I found in Haldimand–Norfolk over the years—I guess it would be six elections now, representing part of Brant county a few years ago, representing part of Oxford a few years ago—that really it's more than feasible to finance an election and to compete in an election and, I found, to win an election without spending an awful lot of money and obviously without accepting an awful lot of money. As long as the playing field is level—and this is the problem and has been the problem certainly for a number of the last three or four elections. Case in point: I think of the six election campaigns in my area. We would end up going to a lot of all-candidates nights—maybe seven or eight or up to 12 all-candidates nights. Sometimes you're there all night. Maybe 100 people would show up. I think I can speak for the other parties locally or the other candidates—whether they be Liberal or NDP, Green Party, Christian Heritage, various groups that run—that it's always an interesting night. Those in the audience, as we know in this business, have pretty well made up their minds before they arrive. It's usually a fairly interesting evening. The media are there. But the question that comes forward: What is the relevance of this local, time-tested method of getting information out in a local riding?

Maybe there are 100 people there. At one of the last all-candidates nights I was involved in, I think we were there for well over three hours. It was a very good evening. So there were 100 of us. We debated everything under the sun. But then there are the 100,000 people in the riding. They're home watching television. Maybe they're watching sports interspersed with multi-million-dollar political advertising campaigns. That influences the other 100,000 people in the riding.

Sure, we perhaps had some influence on the 100 people at that meeting, and maybe a local radio station was there or perhaps a daily paper or oftentimes a weekly paper that would reach out to several thousand people. It's not a level playing field. In my view, these all-candidates nights—I think I can speak for other people who have run against me or I have run against. They really have little relevance for public opinion in the face of this nightly barrage of highly priced television commercials.

Very clearly, and this is long overdue, it's time to curb third-party, special-interest advertising budgets that outspend the political parties—advertising budgets coming from union donations and, in some cases, company coffers.

In the legislation, we very simply ask to allow us all, as elected representatives, to raise a modicum of money. Oftentimes, certainly in the early days of a candidate, it's from friends, from neighbours. I know that when I first ran for the nomination, my parents gave me their address book. It wasn't a Rolodex. It was an address book of their friends and family. We would spend many, many hours writing letters and putting stamps on envelopes and receiving, back then, maybe \$20 or \$25 from people you knew, people who knew you. Perhaps they knew your reputation, perhaps knew your family or how you ran your farm.

What was the money for? In my case, and I do spend very little money during an election, it's to update the signs, buy new signs, print some literature, print some brochures. It may help out volunteers with the price of gas, given that I, for southern Ontario, cover a fairly far-flung constellation of communities. It's about an hour and a half, I guess, to drive across the riding, so gas is one of our expenses during an election.

What I find disgusting with this most recent proposed amendment—I find it somewhat vindictive that this government now proposes an amendment to ban MPPs from being involved in the fundraising, to ban MPPs from showing up to a barbecue. I think of every spring when I have a very small golf tourney. I'm not a golfer. I have maybe golfed six times in my life so far, and the last three, I think, have been at what's called the Toby Tee-Off. It wasn't my suggestion for that name. Maybe 25 of us show up. It's in Port Rowan, down in the far south—it would be the southwest corner of my riding. It's probably closer to Cleveland than it is to Toronto. But we like to have a presence down there. People like us to come down. It's a very small golf course. It's called the Toby Tee-Off. If we are to run that next spring, we'll get 25 people out; they'll pay \$40. I assume I won't be able to go golfing. I might welcome that because I don't own clubs, but I suppose I can sit in the car. I'm not sure. I would like to chat with the people at some point.

1720

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I don't know. There's new rules. Perhaps this hasn't been thought out. Perhaps this particular amendment to ban an MPP from going to some of these small barbecues—I think of an event coming up

locally. My name isn't attached to it, but my riding association puts on a ladies' night. I attend, and I'm very pleased to attend. I say grace at the beginning. I've been doing this for years. This ladies' night has run for nine years now. I don't know whether I attract any \$40 ticket sales by coming out to say grace. My wife is there and my daughter, and my aunt and some of my cousins will come. But if I'm banned from that, I suppose I could sit out on the front step. Maybe somebody would come out and have a cigarette, and I could have a chat then. I'm just not sure how this is going to work.

The real problem is that this system, at present, is big money. It's a rigged system. It's broken. It is open to corruption at the hands of shadow organizations; in my view, many power-hungry bagmen. I remember them back when I was a kid, when my grandfather was a federal MP. We don't want that kind of system to grow the way it has grown in recent years, the system of back-room boys.

I feel very strongly that an elected representative—someone who's dependent on big money to win and to stay in office—has no real power. I have no respect for these elected people. The power has been handed over to their benefactors. They're merely a puppet. It sounds like a cliché, but they are a puppet responding to pulls on their strings. They really don't have a mind of their own.

A solution is offered: enhance the power, enhance the financial independence of politicians. Don't take it away. Don't prohibit them from attending a small golf tourney or a barbecue. Put the power back with the elected people, not the money men.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: In reference to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk, a man of principle—if I didn't represent Windsor–Tecumseh and I lived in Haldimand–Norfolk, I would certainly attend any fundraiser that gentleman held. The same with Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Kingston and the Islands, Oakville, Kitchener–Waterloo, London–Fanshawe—it doesn't matter. I should, because we're dealing with people of principle here. We stand up and we say to the government, “Look, you're doing this on the back of a napkin. You haven't really thought it out.” We're talking about MPP fundraisers. Wherever the bill is, wherever it's hidden away, you won't find MPP fundraisers on it, because the minister responsible for presenting the bill just sent out a news release saying, “At some point in the future, I'm going to have this in the bill. It's not there yet.”

The minister from Ottawa Centre asked us to use speaking notes, so I'll use one from the Ottawa Citizen:

“Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says that the Liberals are still set to benefit from this new regime, compared to the other parties, simply because of government advertising that, well, is but thinly veiled Liberal advertising. The Liberals also have revoked Lysyk's ability to kibosh overtly partisan ads. So that's a problem.”

From the Toronto Sun:

“As they have from the beginning of this controversy, the Liberals are acting unilaterally, using their majority

government to shove meaningful participation by the opposition parties aside.

“And they appear to be developing these plans on the fly, on the back of a napkin.

“To say skepticism of the Liberals’ new-found reformist zeal is warranted would be an understatement.”

No matter where you go in Ontario, people are very skeptical about what’s going on with this bill. Yes, there’s need for reform. We should ban union and corporate donations. But this is something we all need to send to committee and really work on improving.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I’m very pleased to respond to the comments by the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. There are just a couple of things I wanted to touch on. One is the idea that this bill is, I think somebody said, written on the back of a napkin. In fact, this is the bill that has maybe been consulted—and is in the process of being consulted—more than almost any other bill I have crossed.

This bill was originally introduced last spring, and there was a special motion passed by the Legislature to allow the Standing Committee on General Government to sit for four weeks over the summer and hold hearings. Now, this is after first reading. Just so your viewers understand, normally bills don’t get consulted until after second reading. This one went for consultations all over Ontario; for example, in Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Kitchener–Waterloo, London and Windsor. We heard from people all over the province at first reading. So there have been a lot of consultations and, actually, amendments that went into that.

The other thing was a concern that I’ve heard expressed that what we want to do is stop big-money fundraisers. In fact, that’s what this bill would actually do, because Bill 2, if passed, would lower the maximum contribution amount to \$1,200 for nomination contestants or constituency associations, \$1,200 for a candidate in an election, and \$1,200 for a leadership contestant. In fact, the givings are being very much capped by this bill. By definition, the whole notion of big-money events and big-money contributions will be reduced, so that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It’s a pleasure to speak to this. I’m going to mention that the Treasury Board president voted against my bill back in the fall of 2015. Not only did she vote against me, she voted against the recommendations of Elections Ontario officer Greg Essensa, who has brought this, in at least two reports, to this government’s attention, that it needed to be addressed, that there were problems with it. But they voted unanimously.

The Attorney General, in his comments, suggested, “Pick a lane.” I would suggest to him that in October he voted against it, and today it’s all the thing that we have to do. I suggest he might have wanted to pick a lane. Why did he vote against mine? Why did he and his government unanimously not act on the Elections Ontario

officer’s recommendations, which have been put in front of them at least twice, maybe three times, and prior to the last election, I’ll suggest.

Also, it sets a trend here that they actually disregard all of the legislative officers. The AG wanted to have oversight put back in so that she could scrutinize whether there were partisan ads and to clarify that perception of the government taking advantage of funding that they have at their disposal leading up to an election. But they went against that.

Martin Regg Cohn, on March 29, wrote an article in the Toronto Star where he suggested that targets for top ministers range from \$250,000 to \$500,000, with health, finance and energy ministers at the top. Former MPP and Minister of Finance Dwight Duncan is quoted in that same article as saying, “As Minister of Finance you are in a portfolio where people want to see you, and they’ll pay for it.”

In the same Star story, former Liberal Attorney General John Gerretsen talks about how cabinet ministers or their staff get a call from Bobby Walman, the president and chief fundraising officer of the Ontario Liberal Fund, suggesting that, again, they want to make a call to say, “If you want to see cabinet, we need some money here.” I’m paraphrasing, of course, but in essence, that’s the perception that was in the public.

It needs to be addressed. We support that being addressed, Mr. Speaker, but there are still lots of questions. Why, all of a sudden, the flip-flop? Why was it not good in the fall, when I brought my bill, but today they’re supposedly standing on principle?

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I just want to be really clear: The people of this province do not care about politicians fundraising for our elections. What they do care about is a Minister of Energy sitting in a room with six CEOs. They paid a lot of money to be in that room. They’ve won contracts. They won a lot of money through those contracts, and the cost of those contracts is downloaded to the people of this province. We should be looking at this bill through the lens of how it affects the people of this province.

It’s just been a charade, the entire process. They’re talking about a bill that we don’t even have. They’re talking about amendments that will strengthen election financing in the province of Ontario that they have not even deigned to show us. You must excuse us for not trusting you because you’ve given us lots of reasons not to trust this Liberal government.

Just on the final piece: When the Attorney General was getting up and he was going on about the spaghetti fundraisers that we have, these small things that are community builders, and saying that that’s all that we do, the flip-flop for that side of the House is that the Attorney General—four days before he dropped a press release in our committee saying that they would ban all MPP fundraisers—was defending the right of those 10 lawyers

to attend his spaghetti dinner in Ottawa. Maybe he wants to start up a support network for lawyers in the province of Ontario; I have no idea.

But what I will say is that this government lost an opportunity to improve conflict of interest in this bill, to truly ban cash-for-access, and to actually strengthen advocacy issues and the rights of grassroots groups to weigh in on elections, as they have the right to do. There will definitely be a charter challenge in that regard.

This debate needs to be seen through the eyes of the people of this province and that responsibility that we all hold.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's four questions and comments. We return to the member for Haldimand–Norfolk for his reply.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, the comments contributed to the debate. Ideally we are working towards a resolution, perhaps even some solutions, with respect to this problem. I feel it really lies in enhancing the financial independence of an elected representative, to enhance the power of an elected representative by taking the big money out of the process curtailing the lobbyist and shrinking the influence of the special interests, whether it be union or corporate.

Let's get back to winning elections rather than buying elections and, by extension, inculcate principles of integrity—or principle alone—back into the system, because right now there is a stigma attached to those in power soliciting and accepting large donations. Sure, you may outspend your competitors, but you are forever in the back pocket of your campaign donors.

I feel, as an elected representative, that my job is to, very simply, represent those who elected me, not to represent a bagman locally. I swear allegiance to the Queen, not to a money man in my riding. I'm a member of the PC Party. I have no need for a special cadre of advisers or backroom boys to pay for my elections and then feel they have the right to tell me what to do for the next four years. I don't operate that way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I'm actually eager to debate on this bill, Bill 2, the Election Finances Statute Law Amendment Act, because being in the House this evening and listening to all my colleagues about their concerns, it reinforces the fact that this bill is a concern, and not just to us. It should also be a concern to the public, to the people who it's actually ultimately going to affect, because at the heart of our society is our government, and at the heart of our government is our democracy, and elections are about democracy. So when we are formulating this legislation, we're really speaking to our democracy.

When we look at where we are at this point, how we got here—and we've said this, and it's legit: The Premier did say that she sat at her kitchen table, writing her ideas on the back of a napkin. We all have brainstorm ideas, we write quick lists etc., but we don't base legislation on them. The reason that this bill, Bill 2, came about is

because the government was caught. When you are caught doing something you shouldn't have been doing—and I'll equate this to, let's say, you're going to change your eating habits and you're going to make sure you're eating healthy in the house, and all of a sudden you're caught with your hand in a bag of potato chips. Someone in your family catches you. What's your first reaction going to be? Most people would say, "Gee, I'm wrong. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have been indulging in these chips because of health reasons. I apologize and I was wrong, and we need to correct this." But not this government. When they're caught with their hand in the cookie jar, they write the legislation on the back of a napkin.

Interjection.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes.

They've said that instead of waiting for second reading to go to committee, they travelled this bill in the summertime to get feedback. But part of that democratic process—when you take those steps, you are asking for feedback. There were 60 presenters during their travels, and from that information that was gathered, there were suggestions made. There were amendments that the NDP put forward.

When you talk about a democratic process, we are supposed to listen. Listening isn't just nodding your head when someone is speaking; it's active listening. You listen to their ideas. You may not agree with all of it, but you take something from it and you work with it because those suggestions, those recommendations, those amendments have merit. Once you turn yourself off to listening to another voice, that isn't a democratic process. That's an exercise in a fake democratic process.

Speaker, I want to talk about the significant amendment that we brought forward, and that was the conflict of interest, because that's what this is about. We talked about perception of conflict of interest: how the public sees things, how things can get massaged and spun to show a certain perception. We have the opportunity not to do that. We have the opportunity to peel back that perception and actually have the integrity officer have oversight over the conflict of interest. Wouldn't it make the public feel better that there's an actual process, so that if a member has an issue and makes a bad judgment—like putting their hand in that bag of chips when they were trying to stay on their diet—somebody is going to say, "Wait a minute. That's not a good choice. You need to step back from those chips. You need to step back from that fundraiser, and we should be reviewing your conflict of interest."

Let's have a serious conversation, because when all is said and done, legislation is very important. It rules our democracy. If we can't get the legislation correct, if we can't get buy-in from other MPPs and other representatives, if we can't get buy-in from the public, then what is it about? Is it about power? Is it about democracy? If it's about power, this government has a majority government, so they have the power to do what they wish. But a good government, a democratic government, will pay attention

to the other parties and they will extrapolate those good ideas and they will implement them in the legislation.

1740

I don't think it's far-reaching, as the minister of aboriginal affairs said. He actually said that this legislation is meaningful, far-reaching and comprehensive. If you would like to have legislation that's meaningful, far-reaching and comprehensive, I would like to see a conflict-of-interest clause in there. I would like to see the Integrity Commissioner have oversight over that piece because that's what we are discussing here. We're talking about conflict of interest. We're talking about cabinet ministers taking money for access. And that perception is there and that perception is real.

So what is wrong with having an Integrity Commissioner review conflict of interest? That's actually responsible. It's responsible legislation. It's accountable legislation. This government, whether they want to admit it or not, has a problem with accountability and transparency, and whether they want to believe it or not, we are here to guide them into making legislation that's accountable and transparent to the people we represent.

When there was a minority government, Speaker, we had many more people wanting to meet with us. And do you know why? Because of the perception of influence: We had a voice in a minority government because, if you didn't have our support, the government would crash, the government would cease. An election would be called. So now we're here at a majority government and that isn't taken into consideration. Now they have the power. They have the power to make legislation without the support of oppositional parties. And that's the sad part.

So if you want meaningful, far-reaching and comprehensive legislation, look at the amendments. Look at the amendments that hold you accountable and hold every MPP in this House accountable and transparent to the people who elected them. That's what the Election Act should be about. It shouldn't be about who can go where and who can fundraise or who can attend each other's fundraiser. It should be about conflict of interest, transparency and accountability. Because if you go to your fundraiser—a spaghetti dinner or a steak dinner—and you have done it all legit, by the guidelines that are set out, if there's a conflict of interest we won't be able to determine that because there's no oversight for conflict of interest. When people lose their way, we need to bring them back in. We need to reel it in.

I really ask this government to reconsider the amendments and make good on the conflict of interest because the people are disappointed. I'll tell you, when I speak to my constituents, people want to know why this government has gotten away with so many things. They want to know why this government has got away with cancelling the gas plants scandals and no repercussions, no penalties, absolutely nothing. They want to know why they got away with Ornge. How could that have been set up like that, that financial piece? Money was taken out of the public purse and again, no accountability and no consequences for this government. They want to know

these things. Then, we come up with legislation that takes away that oversight.

I don't think this is a good piece of legislation, unless you actually seriously consider the amendments brought forward that actually make this legislation responsible to the public, who we are responsible to. And that's what the member from Kitchener–Waterloo said. We need a lens on this legislation that makes us accountable to the people who sent us here.

Speaker, that's my contribution to this debate. I hope that this government will take that under advisement seriously. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you to the member from London–Fanshawe. When she speaks, she always speaks well and makes her points very, very clearly and I understand what she's saying. I don't always agree, but certainly I think there's a logic that goes along the way when she's explaining her views on certain issues.

I think you have to look at the process and understand how we got to where we are today. I think there was a flavour throughout the country that we needed to change the way that fundraising was done politically—what was okay in the past was determined by, I think, the people of Canada, the people of Ontario, all our provinces—that things could be better, that we could improve on that.

When we introduced the legislation in the spring of this year, the Chief Electoral Officer called it “the most significant redesign of Ontario election laws in more than 40 years.” So that says something, that the initial submission was of high quality. It met with the approval, certainly, of the Chief Electoral Officer.

But when you're making a change that large, you need to take it out to the people of Ontario. That's exactly what we did. A group of my colleagues in the House here sat for four weeks over the summer. They held hearings right throughout the province. They went to Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto, Kitchener–Waterloo, Windsor and London. Ontarians came out and gave their opinions on the bill, and those ideas were then incorporated into what we have before us today.

What happened after that, Speaker? If you look at the opinions that have been expressed—they all come from the late summer—the Globe and Mail called it a huge step in the right direction; the Star's Martin Regg Cohn says that it goes “further than any government in Canada,” that it proposes “a comprehensive ban” and that it's “a comprehensive prohibition” that is “one-upping the opposition,” Speaker.

I think the criticism of this bill is unwarranted. This is what the people of Ontario want. It's time to support it and move it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to follow London–Fanshawe. She brought up some good points: no penalties on things like the gas plants and Ornge in the past. So people remain a bit cynical. What's the reality

here? I put it in my bill last fall that there should be penalties. If people get caught breaking the rules, there should be consequences. There should be some accountability.

The labour minister just brought up a very interesting point, that the elections officer suggested that this was one of the biggest changes in 40 years to this piece of legislation. Three times in this House this government has had the ability to make that change. I opened the door for them as recently as last fall, utilizing the fairness approach and the backing of the Elections Ontario officer, who had put a report in front of them saying that this needs to be changed.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask, and, again, it may sound a bit cynical, but it's what I hear in my riding: Why, all of a sudden, are the Liberals wanting to change this? Have they not had ample opportunity? A third-party legislative officer brought this to the forefront and said, "Here's the report. You need to fix this." There was no interest. Not one member from that side of the House actually stood up and agreed with my bill and said, "You're right. We should do this. We should make changes."

Today we're talking about a bill because they got caught. The perception of Ontarians—with the help of the media, the opposition and the third party brought this to light, and the people of Ontario stepped up and said, "Enough is enough." This is about fairness and trust—the perception of fairness and trust.

The AG, again, has said that we need oversight. They brought it back and said to the government, "You need to have someone independent look at these ads to make sure that the public is being treated properly and that there is no unfair advantage." So why had the Liberals not put this back in, Mr. Speaker?

They say they went out to consultation. Well, I remember the budget process, where they travelled across the province and had all kinds of people come out and tell them, yet they brought out their budget before the report was even finished. Again, I apologize to them that the public is a little bit cynical. I'm certainly very cynical.

At the end of the day, we asked for a select committee. All three parties could have been involved and written this so that there was no perception of unfair advantage. They didn't do that. We'll have to see where it goes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know, process matters. Process does matter. So when the government stands up on that side of the House and says, "Well, we went out and we consulted"—they didn't consult on the amendments that are being proposed by the Attorney General. A full, outright ban on all MPPs doing corn roasts and spaghetti dinners and what have you: That was not proposed when they took this bill out for the summer.

The good thing, though, is that the media has caught on. From the *Globe and Mail*: "Do the Liberals now expect anyone to believe that, just because a cabinet minister can't attend a fundraiser, he or she won't be beholden to major donors?"

This is why we brought up the conflict of interest. We brought amendments to Bill 201, which was the original iteration. You voted against those amendments. You know that you did. It's a matter of record. This is why it matters, though, to the people of this province, because it does compromise trust.

I think the member from London–Fanshawe sort of got to this piece—this is the trust piece. Why does this matter? This is from the *Globe and Mail's* Adrian Morrow: "The analysis reveals that attendees included construction firms with lucrative government infrastructure contracts, electricity companies with an interest in seeing the government continue outsourcing much of the province's power generation, pharmaceutical corporations that depend on the province to list their drugs for coverage and the banks that made nearly \$60 million off the privatization of Hydro One.

1750

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we on this side of the House do not have the power to give those contracts. We want the Integrity Commissioner to have the oversight to protect the interests of the public against a government that is clearly putting their own interests ahead of the people of this province. What a missed opportunity.

I look forward to the amendments. It's the first time that we're debating a bill where we don't have all of the bill before us. That speaks volumes to the people of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you to the member for London–Fanshawe for her remarks. As always, it's appreciated.

With all the debate that's going on in the Legislature this afternoon, I think the bottom line is that with Bill 2 we're going to fundamentally change the way that politics is done in Ontario. It's worth repeating—the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound referenced it, but the Minister of Labour referenced it first—that the Chief Electoral Officer called this "the most significant redesign of Ontario election laws in more than 40 years."

That's why we did take it to Ontarians. That's why we did do the consultations throughout the summer. We sat for four weeks over the summer to hear from Ontarians all across the province of Ontario. I think we need to thank all the Ontarians who came out and gave their feedback on the bill. As a result of that, we brought forward legislation that is absolutely unprecedented.

We've spoken about a number of things in today's debate, but the fact that we are banning corporate and union donations—I think it's fair to say that too often people hear about a donation either to the government or to the opposition parties from a corporation or a union with a stake in provincial legislation. We've been incredibly clear that donations do not purchase policy decisions for our government. Nonetheless, I think it's fair to say, to acknowledge that we understand that corporate and union donations can create the perception

of this influence. That's why they need to be removed, and that's why this is such an important part of the legislation.

I do think that we have agreement on that point, and I'm glad that we have. Certainly, there is general agreement across the floor for that in particular. I could quote a number of the members, but I'm running out of time to say that. That's something that we take very, very seriously, as we do recognize in the fact that this legislation is something that needs to be brought forward. We'd appreciate support from all members of the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments for this round. The member for London–Fanshawe can reply.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the Minister of Labour, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the illustrious member from Kitchener–Waterloo and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Speaker, when you boil it down, it is about trust. People need to trust their government. The legislation we present in this House, our actions and the debates we have are all about making sure that people have confidence in the governments they elect. If the process for electing those representatives isn't accountable and transparent, it lacks trust. Therefore, there's more room for

cynicism and there's more room for people to be skeptical.

We're trying to build relationships in our constituency. We're here to bring their voices into this Legislature in order to do good work on their behalf, and this piece of legislation is not the best work of this government when they're not paying attention to meaningful amendments. Those meaningful amendments allow for accountability and transparency. Therefore, when you have those things in legislation, you will have a level of trust from the people who elected you and who buy into that.

If legislation doesn't work, it's a waste. It's not an effective use of our time, and it's not going to help the people who elected us to be here. It's actually a disservice. If this government wants to make legislation that's meaningful, far-reaching and comprehensive, please pay attention to the amendments that were brought forward during the committee process by other members.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being very close to 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1755.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, William Short

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
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Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Ballard, Hon. / L'hon. Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	Minister of Housing / Ministre du Logement Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brown, Patrick (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of International Trade / Ministre du Commerce International
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
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Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism / Ministre délégué à l'Action contre le racisme
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires des personnes âgées Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement économique et de la Croissance
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Gélinas, France (NDP) Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Nickel Belt Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP) Hardeman, Ernie (PC) Harris, Michael (PC) Hatfield, Percy (NDP) Hillier, Randy (PC)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest Oxford Kitchener–Conestoga Windsor–Tecumseh Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB) Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Barrie 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
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB) Lalonde, Hon. / L'hon. Marie-France (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre Ottawa–Orléans	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister Responsible for Accessibility / Ministre responsable de l'Accessibilité Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
MacLaren, Jack (PC) MacLeod, Lisa (PC) Malhi, Harinder (LIB) Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills Nepean–Carleton Brampton–Springdale Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP) Martins, Cristina (LIB) Martow, Gila (PC) Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	Algoma–Manitoulin Davenport Thornhill London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development / Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Formation professionnelle Minister Responsible for Digital Government / Ministre responsable du Gouvernement numérique
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB) McDonell, Jim (PC) McGarry, Hon. / L'hon. Kathryn (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry Cambridge	Minister of Municipal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires municipales
McMahon, Hon. / L'hon. Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNaughton, Monte (PC) Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB) Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (NDP)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex Etobicoke–Lakeshore Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research, Innovation and Science / Ministre de la Recherche, de l'Innovation et des Sciences
Munro, Julia (PC)	York-Simcoe	
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Indira (LIB)	Halton	Associate Minister of Education (Early Years and Child Care) / Ministre associée de l'Éducation (Petite enfance et Garde d'enfants)
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Attorney General / Procureur général Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent-Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth-Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches-East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland-Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint du gouvernement
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward-Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Hon. / L'hon. Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron-Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation / Ministre des Relations avec les Autochtones et de la Réconciliation
Vacant	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	
Vacant	Ottawa-Vanier	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Présidente: Cheri DiNovo
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Bob Delaney, Cheri DiNovo
Joe Dickson, Han Dong
Michael Harris, Sophie Kiwala
Arthur Potts, Todd Smith
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Peter Z. Milczyn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Han Dong, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Ann Hoggarth
Peter Z. Milczyn, Lou Rinaldi
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Yvan Baker, Mike Colle
Grant Crack, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Harinder Malhi
Jim McDonnell, Lou Rinaldi
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
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Wayne Gates, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
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Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

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Michael Mantha, Cristina Martins
Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qaadri
Laurie Scott
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Steve Clark
Granville Anderson, Robert Bailey
James J. Bradley, Steve Clark
Vic Dhillon, Sophie Kiwala
Michael Mantha, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
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John Fraser, Ernie Hardeman
Percy Hatfield, Monte Kwinter
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Arthur Potts
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
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Ted McMeekin, Mario Sergio
Bill Walker, Soo Wong
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Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
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Ted McMeekin, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
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