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(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Wednesday 19 October 2016

Mercredi 19 octobre 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

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Deborah Deller

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CONTENTS / TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Wednesday 19 October 2016 / Mercredi 19 octobre 2016

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Patients First Act, 2016, Bill 41, Mr. Hoskins / Loi de 2016 donnant la priorité aux patients, projet de loi 41, M. Hoskins

Hon. Yasir Naqvi	823
Hon. Eric Hoskins	824
Mr. John Fraser	828
Mr. Jim McDonell	831
Mr. Taras Natyshak	832
Hon. Glen R. Murray	832
Mr. Rick Nicholls	832
Mr. John Fraser	833
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	833

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Mr. Rick Nicholls	833
Mr. Percy Hatfield	833
Hon. Helena Jaczek	833
Mrs. Julia Munro	833
Mr. Joe Dickson	833
Ms. Laurie Scott	833
Hon. Liz Sandals	833
Mrs. Gila Martow	833
Hon. Michael Gravelle	833
Mr. Todd Smith	833
Hon. Deborah Matthews	833
Hon. Glen R. Murray	833
Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris	834
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	834
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	834
Cindy Nicholas	
Mr. Lorne Coe	834
Ms. Jennifer K. French	835
Hon. Brad Duguid	836
The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac)	837

ORAL QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ORALES

Hydro rebates

Mr. John Yakabuski	837
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	837

Health care funding

Mr. Jeff Yurek	838
Hon. Eric Hoskins	838
Mr. Bill Walker	838
Ms. Laurie Scott	838

Electronic health information

Ms. Andrea Horwath	839
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	839
Hon. Eric Hoskins	839

Privatization of public assets

Ms. Andrea Horwath	840
Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne	840
Hon. Glenn Thibeault	840

Health care funding

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson	841
Hon. Eric Hoskins	841
Mrs. Julia Munro	841

Automobile insurance

Mr. Jagmeet Singh	841
Hon. Charles Sousa	842

Health care funding

Ms. Ann Hoggarth	842
Hon. Eric Hoskins	842

Health care

Ms. Lisa MacLeod	843
Hon. Eric Hoskins	843
Mrs. Gila Martow	843

Health care funding

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	843
Hon. Eric Hoskins	843

Small business

Mr. Arthur Potts	844
Hon. Brad Duguid	844

Health care funding

Mr. Randy Pettapiece	845
Hon. Eric Hoskins	845
Mr. Monte McNaughton	845

Child care

Ms. Andrea Horwath	845
Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris	845

Municipal government

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn	846
Hon. Bill Mauro	846

Health care funding

Mr. Norm Miller	847
Hon. Eric Hoskins	847

DEFERRED VOTES / VOTES DIFFÉRÉS

Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act, 2016, Bill 13, Mr. Thibeault / Loi de 2016 sur la remise de l'Ontario pour les consommateurs d'électricité, projet de loi 13, M. Thibeault	
Third reading agreed to	847

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS / PRÉSENTATION DES VISITEURS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod	848
------------------------	-----

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS / DÉCLARATIONS DES DÉPUTÉS

Hydro rates	
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	848
Disaster relief	
Mr. Peter Tabuns	848
Advanced manufacturing and design technologies	
Mrs. Amrit Mangat	848
Child Abuse Prevention Month	
Mrs. Gila Martow	848
Autism treatment	
Miss Monique Taylor	849
Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre	
Ms. Daiene Vernile	849
Assistance to farmers	
Mr. Todd Smith	849
Small business	
Mr. John Vanthof	849
Dick Watts	
Mrs. Cristina Martins	850

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS / DÉPÔT DES PROJETS DE LOI

Election Statute Law Amendment Act, 2016, Bill 45, Mr. Naqvi / Loi de 2016 modifiant des lois en ce qui concerne les élections, projet de loi 45, M. Naqvi	
First reading agreed to	850
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	850

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES / DÉCLARATIONS MINISTÉRIELLES ET RÉPONSES

Women's History Month / Mois de l'histoire des femmes	
Hon. Tracy MacCharles	850
Access to justice	
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	852
Women's History Month	
Ms. Laurie Scott	853

Access to justice	
Mr. Randy Hillier	854
Access to justice	
Mr. Jagmeet Singh	854
Women's History Month	
Ms. Catherine Fife	854

MOTIONS

Private members' public business	
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	855
Motion agreed to	855
Private members' public business	
Hon. Yasir Naqvi	855
Motion agreed to	855

PETITIONS / PÉTITIONS

Hydro rates	
Mr. Robert Bailey	855
Post-secondary sector employees	
Ms. Catherine Fife	856
Hydro rates	
Ms. Lisa MacLeod	856
Privatization of public assets	
Ms. Jennifer K. French	856
Green power generation	
Mrs. Gila Martow	856
Logements pour personnes âgées	
M. John Vanthof	856
Hydro rates	
Ms. Laurie Scott	857
Lyme disease	
Mr. Todd Smith	857
Hospital funding	
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	857
Hydro rates	
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	857
Agri-food industry	
Mr. Rick Nicholls	858
Privatization of public assets	
Ms. Laurie Scott	858
Landfill	
Mr. Ernie Hardeman	858

ORDERS OF THE DAY / ORDRE DU JOUR

Protecting Students Act, 2016, Bill 37, Ms. Hunter / Loi de 2016 protégeant les élèves, projet de loi 37, Mme Hunter	
Ms. Jennifer K. French	859
Hon. Dipika Damerla	860

Mr. Todd Smith.....	860
Mr. Jagmeet Singh	861
Mr. Lou Rinaldi.....	861
Ms. Jennifer K. French.....	861
Hon. Dipika Damerla	862
Hon. David Zimmer	863
Mr. Lou Rinaldi.....	864
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	864
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	865
Mrs. Cristina Martins	865
Mr. Robert Bailey	865
Mr. Lou Rinaldi.....	866
Mr. Jim McDonell.....	866
Mr. Robert Bailey	867
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	869

Hon. Tracy MacCharles	869
Ms. Laurie Scott	869
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	870
Mr. Jim McDonell	870
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	870

**Promoting Affordable Housing Act, 2016, Bill 7,
Mr. Ballard / Loi de 2016 sur la promotion du
logement abordable, projet de loi 7, M. Ballard**

Mr. Randy Hillier	871
Ms. Catherine Fife.....	873
Ms. Soo Wong.....	873
Ms. Laurie Scott	873
Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong	874
Mr. Randy Hillier	874
Second reading debate deemed adjourned	874

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 19 October 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 19 octobre 2016

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PATIENTS FIRST ACT, 2016
LOI DE 2016 DONNANT
LA PRIORITÉ AUX PATIENTS

Mr. Naqvi, on behalf of Mr. Hoskins, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 41, An Act to amend various Acts in the interests of patient-centred care / Projet de loi 41, Loi modifiant diverses lois dans l'intérêt des soins axés sur les patients.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the member from London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I believe we do not have a quorum.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A quorum call.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): A quorum is present, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me to speak on Bill 41. I will be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa South.

I feel very privileged on this extremely important piece of legislation because it sets up the future direction of our publicly funded health care system. As an Ontarian and as a Canadian, I am extremely proud of the fact that we have a publicly funded, universally accessible health care system that really ensures that all of us have the most important tenet of ensuring that we have good-quality lives in terms of a health care system available to us all.

Speaker, as you know, I have the great honour and privilege of serving the great community of Ottawa Centre. In my community, I have amazing examples of incredible health care institutions that provide very important care in my community. I will highlight a few: places like the Centretown Community Health Centre, where I had the great honour of serving as a member of the board; or the Somerset West Community Health Centre, which serves the areas of Hintonburg, Mechanicsville, Westboro and Wellington Village; not to mention the Carlington Community Health Centre, serving the neighbourhood of Carlington and other surrounding areas. These three community health centres provide in-

credible, community-centred, locally focused health care. Through this important legislation, their role will be further enhanced as a strong front-line deliverer of health care.

Other important institutions in my community in the great riding of Ottawa Centre are places like the Ottawa Hospital Civic Campus, which is almost 100 years old and has been serving the entire city of Ottawa—in fact, the entire region—for some time. It is the hub, the key trauma centre in our city, serving many, many people. In fact, my daughter, Elliana, was born at the civic hospital right in the riding, so I know the amazing health care professionals—the doctors, the nurses, the other medical staff—who do just an incredible job in serving our community.

The other great institution in my community that is going to benefit tremendously through this legislation is the University of Ottawa Heart Institute, perhaps one of the best cardiac centres in the world, with world-class research taking place and care being provided. The heart institute, in fact, at this time, is going through a tremendous expansion. We're investing almost \$200 million in expanding the heart institute with new, state-of-the-art surgery rooms that are going to ensure better care.

What Bill 41 does is it ensures the coordination of care in our communities, be it our community health centres or our hospitals or our family health teams, so that it all takes place in a manner that puts patients in the middle of it all. So instead of our patients, residents in my community, going from one health care service or facility to the other, they actually get health care built around them, making sure that the services they need are really focused on their needs as opposed to them trying to figure out what those services are.

The last point I will make before I pass it on to the member from Ottawa South, and I'm sure that the Minister of Health will be speaking on this bill as well, is the focus on our seniors, making sure that our seniors have the important home care available to them.

One of the biggest things I hear in my community when I'm going door to door to door every weekend is that seniors want to continue to live in their homes. They don't want to live in a retirement home or long-term residence, and they want to get those important services delivered to them at home. I think this bill takes a very important step by making sure that that care coordination for seniors and the care they receive all gets coordinated at a local level through the local health integration network.

Lastly, I just want to give a big shout-out and a thank you to the Champlain LHIN, the CEO at Champlain

LHIN, Chantale LeClerc, and her entire team and staff who do an amazing job in our region in providing quality delivery of care. I'm very fortunate to come from Ottawa and represent the community of Ottawa Centre, which is a beneficiary of a very, very good, publicly funded, universally accessible health care system. I look forward to working along with the Minister of Health and our government and all members in this House in making sure that those types of health care services are available.

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

Applause.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the applause. I think it's for my arrival. I want to thank the member for Ottawa South.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Windsor–Tecumseh on a point of order.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. I could be wrong. With all due respect, I don't believe the House leader said he would be sharing his time when he stood up this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): He did not initially start off with that but during his speech he did mention he would be sharing his time.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: No, sir, he said he would be passing it—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member will sit down.

Continue.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. I want to express my gratitude to the member from Ottawa South for beginning this important conversation, which I'll continue, of course. As always, I appreciate the affection that's coming from the other side.

I'm of course pleased to rise today to speak to the second reading of the proposed Patients First Act, 2016, which I think, as we all know, is an act that, if passed, will further the commitments of our government to transform our health care system into one that puts the needs of patients at its absolute centre.

I should add that yesterday and the day before I chaired and co-chaired a provincial-territorial meeting of health ministers, a meeting which included federal health minister Jane Philpott at her federal-provincial-territorial meeting. It was absolutely clear throughout the discussion how we all share the perspective that we need to ensure, as those responsible and accountable for providing health services in our provinces and territories, that we keep patients at the centre of all of our activities and the objectives, the goals that we set, the outcomes that we're looking to achieve. It was gratifying to hear that strong consensus emerging from that gathering. It reinforces the object of this bill, which, by the title itself, but certainly through its contents, has as its core the patient-centred, patient-focused effort.

0910

I have already acknowledged the member for Ottawa South. I thank him for sharing his time with me on this important subject matter. I also want to thank him for his strong assistance and support with this important piece of

legislation. I also know that we'll be hearing from the member from Ottawa—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Centre. Centre is over there, and this is south.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Centre. It's south over here, centre over there. And it is hard; you would think after eight years I would have my bearings in this Legislature.

But regardless of where they sit, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that both members from Ottawa, Ottawa South and Ottawa Centre, have done an extraordinary job in supporting this piece of legislation, providing strong advice and good advice to make sure that it delivers on its promise of delivering better patient-centred health care, better coordinated and collaborative health care in this province. I want to thank them and I want to thank, indeed, all of our government's partners in health care that have participated in this process.

Mr. Speaker, it's true that every day across this province, in countless different ways, dedicated health care professionals are making a difference in the lives of Ontario patients, whether that's in our hospitals, in our health care centres, our long-term-care homes or in our communities. These are the people responding to the needs of our families and our friends in their times of need. Together I believe we share one common goal, and that's to do our very best for the people of Ontario.

That's why I want to thank all of our health care partners for all of their help in moving forward with our government's plan to transform our health care system into one that puts patients first. I want to thank them for working with us on our proposal to help improve its structure.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to move effectively ahead with our government's proposal to improve the structure of our health care system, we must continue to be able to work together as true partners, with a shared interest in providing the best possible care for patients. Our history is proof that when we work together there is much that we can accomplish. Together, we've already made great strides in strengthening our health care system. Thanks to our ability to work together, we can say that 94% of Ontarians now have a regular family health care provider. More patients have access to care closer to home. We're seeing shorter wait times for most surgical procedures, improved emergency department wait times, and more support for people to stay healthy through a greater focus on disease prevention and health promotion.

It's taken a lot of planning and a lot of hard work, but together we have made a difference in the lives of patients across this province. Consider the case of Linda, a patient with complex needs who has been benefiting from the services of the North Simcoe Community Health Link. Since connecting with her care coordinator, Linda says she now has access to so many agencies that she didn't even know were available to her. That gives her a lot of comfort. She says some people just want someone who will listen, and through meeting with her care coordinator, Linda has said that she has built a relationship of trust. As a result, she has become more

trusting and honest with her doctor as well. Today, Linda is leading a better quality of life because she's better informed and our health care system is better integrated.

But we have more work to do. Despite our successes, we know that, too often, the services that we deliver are, and remain, fragmented. Our system could be better coordinated, and the services that people rely on can be better distributed across this province.

While the work we've done to date has made a tremendous difference for patients in Ontario, we need to ensure that our health care system is benefiting all patients equally right across the province. So my ministry and I are actively working, for example, with indigenous leadership and organizations to look at how we can improve health outcomes for indigenous peoples and their families and their communities. Many, as we know, are located in remote areas of this province.

We know that newcomers to our country and our province are dealing with a health care system that doesn't always fully recognize their challenges or perhaps doesn't deliver culturally appropriate care. We also know that some Franco-Ontarians find it challenging to access the services that they need, and that we have a responsibility to provide, in French. We need to look at how we provide services to those faced with mental health and addictions issues to ensure that they have the care they need when and where they need it.

Ontarians deserve to have a health care system that provides them with seamless, consistent and compassionate care. In order to strengthen our health care system, we must address the challenges that are preventing us from delivering fully integrated, patient-centred care. We know that, at their root, these challenges stem from the differences in how our health services are both planned and managed. Currently, the way our health care system is structured, our LHINs—our local health integration networks—are responsible for our hospitals, our long-term-care homes, community services and our mental health and addiction services. Yet, surprisingly, primary care, home and community care, and population and public health services are all being planned and managed in a distinctly different way. While CCACs—community care access centres—are accountable to LHINs for their performance and look to our LHINs for funding, they have their own boards that operate and function independently. Similarly, the work of our public health system in local communities operates separately from other health sectors—our primary care system.

We have all the pieces of the puzzle, yet those individual pieces are not yet forming a cohesive picture, so we need to better integrate our health care system. That's the structure I was talking about earlier. We need to get everyone working toward the same goal of providing easily accessible, fully integrated services, working in coordination for the benefit of all Ontarians.

For all of these reasons, our government is proposing the legislation that's before us today. This legislation builds on the commitments that we made through the Patients First action plan. That plan aims to improve the

patients' experience, make our system more transparent and even more accountable, and ensure that our universal health care system will be there when we need it for generations to come. These aren't simply lofty ideals but principles worth striving for and worth defending—always. If we believe that everybody has a right to good health and good health care services, then we need to be asking ourselves how we can ensure universality, how we can improve access and how we can deliver the highest quality of care. The choices we make must be rooted in evidence and in the patient experience.

To improve the health care experience for Ontarians, we need to move away from the status quo. We need to understand what our patients need in order to support the models that serve them best. In fact, every decision I make as Ontario's Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is fully centred on these principles. I'm committed to providing Ontarians with faster access to the right care and to delivering better-coordinated and better-integrated care in their communities. I want to make sure that people and patients are getting the education, the information and the transparency they need to make the right decisions about their health.

0920

Just as important, I am committed to doing all of this while protecting our universal health care system. I'm committed to making decisions based on value and based on quality. This will help to ensure that the health care system that we enjoy today will continue to be there tomorrow for our children, our grandchildren and the generations beyond them.

In order to deliver on that promise, that promise of equitable access to health care for all, we have to reorganize our system in a bold and transformational way. The Patients First Act proposes to do just that.

If passed, the legislation before us today would help us to build a system that best meets the needs of Ontarians, a system that closes the gaps that exist and one that would help bring health care services to the people who truly need them most. A system that best meets the needs of patients in an equitable way is one that is truly population-focused and deeply integrated at the local level. To do that, we need strong local health system planning and strong management.

About a decade ago, in April 2006, our government created the LHINs with the goal of improving local health care system planning, integration and service delivery to better meet the needs of patients. We did that because we understood that the best way to meet a local population's needs was not by managing everything from an office here in Toronto, but by allowing local experts to control and implement care, care that best reflects the needs of the community.

Mr. Speaker, as I have travelled across the province in my role as minister, I have had the opportunity to meet with all of our LHINs and their boards. Those opportunities demonstrated to me the depth of local knowledge and the capacity that each of our LHINs has to be true local managers of our health care system. Not only do

they know the needs of the local population, but they also know the partners and the service providers who care for that population.

I want to see the LHINs continue to evolve. I believe that they should play a more central role in our health care system, one that better acknowledges the true importance of local decision-making and local management. Part of that evolution includes primary care.

Working alongside our partners in health care, our government is constantly engaging in discussions about the future of our health care system. Throughout that process, we've been fortunate to have benefited immeasurably from the work of a number of highly skilled experts, not the least of which were recommendations put forward by Dr. David Price, Elizabeth Baker and the panel members of the Primary Health Care Expert Advisory Committee. In their report on reforming primary care, a report that came from the experts, the front-line clinicians in primary care across this province itself, the panel called for primary care providers to be better integrated not just among themselves, but also within the health care system at the local level.

The recommendations of the panel, a panel that emerged from those front-line expert and experienced clinicians in primary care themselves, have only served to reinforce what we already know about primary care: that it is an absolutely essential and important part of the bedrock of our health care system.

Yet it needs to be better organized around the needs of patients and around the needs of the local population that it serves. That's why we're working to establish sub-regions within LHINs to serve as that focal point for population-based planning, for service alignment, integration and performance improvement—precisely the recommendation, the strongest recommendation, that came from that Primary Health Care Expert Advisory Committee.

It's important that we all understand that sub-regions aren't boundaries. They will be geographic units that will enable planners and providers to better identify and respond to the health care needs of local communities in Ontario.

Now, transforming our health care system into one that is focused on population health and equitable access requires greater and better local governance. We need our LHINs and local clinicians to play a much greater role in championing key activities at the community level, including population-based health care planning, health care services integration, clinical change management, and performance and quality improvement.

But perhaps the single most important quality of a truly patient-centred health care system is that quality of being integrated. That includes further integrating our home and community care sector as well.

For some time now, we have been working hard to transform our home and community care system so that it delivers better and more consistent care for the patients who rely on it. We followed explicitly the advice of Dr. Gail Donner and her expert group on home and

community care, who told us that we needed to focus first on consistent services that meet the needs of local populations before we considered making changes to the structure and to the governance of that aspect of our health care system. We have done that.

Last year, we launched our home and community care road map that outlined 10 concrete steps that we're taking to improve the home care experience for both patients and caregivers. We are now taking steps to provide more consistent services across the province.

What the Baker-Price report, and the report of Dr. Donner and her panel, and so many other expert reports have in common goes back to what I was speaking about earlier. It goes back to the belief that each and every Ontarian deserves to have a health care system that provides them with integrated, consistent and high-quality care. But it's also about providing equity.

We know that LHINs are uniquely positioned to help us deliver greater equity in health care. They have already demonstrated what they can do in terms of improving regional planning and the integration of services. Yet as the Auditor General has pointed out, LHINs have neither the mandate nor the tools to integrate all of the health services being offered.

That is where the proposed Patients First Act would come in. What our government is proposing with this legislation is to give LHINs the tools they need to better integrate our health care system. It's in their name—local health integration network—yet they need to have the tools and the resources to fully integrate what often can be a fractured health care system.

We're proposing to give LHINs the responsibility for the management and service delivery of home and community care, for primary care, planning and performance management, and, importantly, for building stronger links with public health.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a public health physician myself. By forging those stronger links between our public health units, our medical offices of health and our LHINs, that is to the benefit of all of us. The experts—not the only experts, but truly experts—in population health, in health equity, in the social determinants of health are our public health workers, our medical officers of health, our RNs, our managers, those who work in that public health system. What we need is the benefit of their expertise, of their experience throughout our health care system as we continue to push further towards a wellness approach to the delivery of health services. We need to know that we're doing that in an equitable way, in a way which reflects population health needs and impacts social determinants of health.

We also intend to make our LHINs more accountable to the public. By focusing on a local approach, we expect to reduce bureaucracy and administration in home and community care to remove overlap and duplication and to make it easier for patients to find a doctor or to find home care when they need it.

0930

With the support and oversight of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, LHINs would be able to

build new connections between primary care providers, hospitals, home and community care, and public health to improve health care for Ontarians across the province, no matter where they live.

Those are those missing pieces. Our LHINs are already responsible for long-term-care homes, for community services, for our hospitals, for mental health services; we are bringing those other elements, those remaining elements of our health care system, into the fold. That coordination is most important to the patient and the patient experience. They're not interested in the structure or the governance. Patients and Ontarians are interested in receiving the highest quality of care in a timely fashion and in a way that is as seamless and coordinated as possible. It all comes back to the patient.

One thing we need to keep in mind about this proposed legislation is that a patient's primary concern, as I mentioned, is not the structure of our health care system; they rely on us for that. The patient's principal concern is whether they get the care they need and whether it's going to be there when they need it.

What we're proposing to do with this legislation is to create an easier way to access the health care system that respects a patient's right to choice. What we're proposing to do will provide patients with one point of contact to access primary care and the other services that they need, with better access to same-day, next-day, after-hours and weekend care.

For our doctors, our nurses, our care providers, this proposed legislation would provide them with a structure that supports greater integration, while still maintaining their clinical autonomy.

If passed, this bill would enable our specialists to benefit from stronger local planning that would enhance their access to services and promote the use of technology and telemedicine to provide better service to complex patients, regardless of where they live. For hospitals, this new structure would help with high rates of hospital readmission, alternate level of care days and the inappropriate use of emergency services. The essential work that our CCAC employees are doing would continue under the proposed legislation, but under this new vision, the CCACs would be working directly within our LHINs. Public health practitioners would continue the important work that they're doing, but they would be more connected to the rest of our health care system. For those in the long-term-care sector, it would mean better support in managing transitions for clients between acute and home and community care, with better service planning in the home and community care sector.

The proposed legislation before us today would make for a more efficient health care system, reducing the duplication of services and resulting in a better sharing of information. It would help us build connections across the health care system, across that full continuum of care.

Now, it's important to point out that the proposed legislation was built through the hard work of our government in consultation with all of our health care partners, all of our stakeholders and, most importantly, Ontario patients.

That consultation began last December when I put forward a discussion paper for all to consider. We heard from all of our stakeholders. We heard from and interacted with more than 6,000 individuals. We consulted numerous times with the Ontario Medical Association. We received direct consultative feedback from our doctors from the OMA. We consulted with our nurses. We consulted with virtually every one of our stakeholders; those that represent them were made aware and invited to participate.

We took many, many months to ensure that we were able to benefit from their expertise and their perspective and incorporate that into this act. In fact, by introducing it just before the summer and then reintroducing it recently, we had the benefit of that entire summer period to go back, with this specific proposed legislation, to our partners, to go back to the OMA, to go back to the nurses, to go back to other health care providers and stakeholders—those that provide home and community care, those in our long-term-care homes, those in our hospitals—to benefit from their experience through a consultative process and incorporate their good ideas to make this legislation even stronger.

I mentioned the thorough consultation with our stakeholders and our health care providers, but we also consulted across the province with Ontarians—with patients, with clients, with individual Ontarians, with caregivers—that have the greatest stake in this. We consulted and engaged extensively, in English and in French, with more than 6,000 individuals and organizations across the province to help inform the proposed improvements to the health care system—and, I should point out, Mr. Speaker, improvements that were based on expert panels from within the health system realm to begin with: from those experts, those front-line workers, those with experience in primary care and home and community care that provided us with the substrate for this act that you see before you today.

We spoke with patients, with caregivers, with francophones, with indigenous peoples, health care partners, staff, clinicians, municipal and other community and government partners to gather feedback on our proposal.

When the ministry first released the Patients First discussion document back in December, I made a commitment at that time to meaningfully engage with indigenous partners. We're following through on that commitment through a parallel process that will collaboratively identify specifically what is needed for responsive and transformational change, especially with respect to equitable access to services that meet their unique needs. Of course, we will also continue to work with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban indigenous partners to foster positive relationships and ensure that any changes in the proposed legislation will not negatively impact their current or future access to care.

I was gratified on my initiative yesterday. We had a two-hour meeting as part of the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of health meeting, a two-hour meeting specifically with indigenous leadership from across

this country: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. We spent more than two hours listening to them, hearing from them about the challenges that they face, about the bold and concrete proposals they have to move forward to reduce and eventually eliminate those negative health outcomes that we know are so pervasive through those communities across this nation.

We've also taken steps to ensure that one of the key planning objectives of the LHINs is to encourage access and better integrate the health needs of the francophone community at the local level. This was a key objective that the French Language Health Services Advisory Council asked us to consider, and I fully supported this objective.

We have gathered feedback from across the province. Most of those consulted agreed that there is a need to focus on achieving better system integration, improved performance, needs-based planning and delivery, greater health equity, and continuity in home and community care as well as in primary care. The vast majority of the feedback we received was supportive of the strategies proposed, so we knew we were headed in the right direction with the legislation that we were developing.

We also received feedback that suggested additional priorities needed to be addressed, including the need for strong collaboration between the LHINs and primary care providers, and removing the LHIN directive over hospitals so that directive powers—for operations and new policies—and supervisory powers are only at the minister's direction. You will see from the proposed legislation that we've taken steps to respond effectively to that feedback.

0940

Further, Mr. Speaker, you may note that the proposed legislation here today has, in fact, continued to evolve from the earlier Bill 210 which, as I mentioned, was first introduced back in June. This bill is the result of ongoing conversations, conversations with our health care partners, conversations that continued throughout the summer, have continued into the fall and continue as we move forward with this bill.

Speaker, I can say with confidence that we have left no stone unturned in our effort to create the best possible legislation and, if passed, our government will continue to rely on our partners in health care for their input and additional feedback. It's important that if we undertake any changes to our health care system, we must do so carefully and in partnership with all of our health care partners to make sure that patients have ongoing, smooth, coordinated access to the health services that they depend on, that they need to rely on and that we have the responsibility to provide. The goal here is to make changes to the structure and governance of our health care system as seamlessly as possible, so that Ontarians can continue to enjoy the high-quality care that they have come to expect. Our government remains as committed as ever to the goal of putting patients at the centre of all we do in health care. The proposed Patients First Act is the next step in ensuring a system that is best able to deliver on that commitment.

Before I wrap up and hand things over to the MPP for Ottawa South—I got it right that time—I just want to take a moment to, once again, thank all of our partners in health care, to thank them for their continuing contribution to the legislation we are considering here today. This truly is their legislation. It emerged and has grown from the advice that we have received through expert panels, through task forces, through consultation and through regular engagement of our health partners. They will be able to see themselves in the evolution of this important piece of legislation, so I want to thank them for that contribution and the continuing contribution that they make every day to serving the people of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, we want to ensure that patients in Ontario have equitable access to care, that their needs are being met and that their choices are being respected. We look forward to continuing to build on those relationships with our partners as we move forward, and not just with our health care partners but with patients, with clients, with Ontarians, with caregivers who are critically important participants. Thank you all. I know I have spoken at length about why our government would like to see the proposed Patients First Act enacted into law and why it's necessary for the future of our health care system. I would now like to turn things over to my colleague the member from Ottawa South, who will walk us through some details of the proposed legislation.

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

Mr. John Fraser: I am extremely proud to rise today in support of the proposed Patients First Act, 2016, and equally proud to rise after the comments from the Minister of Health and from the Attorney General, who I know is also a champion for health care in our region of Ottawa.

I'm in support of the bill that, if passed, would improve access to care for patients and their families. The proposed Patients First Act is, of course, the next step forward made in Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care, which Minister Hoskins released last year. I would like to thank the minister for his leadership on this file and congratulate him on the action plan and this piece of legislation. I'm proud to be associated with both.

We've just heard from the minister about why this legislation is so critical and about why it is so important to move ahead and plan to transform our health care system into one that puts the needs of patients at its centre. What I would like to do now is demonstrate to all of my colleagues in this House how we are going to achieve this.

Bill 41, if passed by the Ontario Legislature, would help us fulfill our action plan to provide patients with faster access to the right care, to better home and community care, to the information they need to live healthy lives, and a health care system that's sustainable for generations to come.

It starts with a clear objective. Our government is committed to improving the patient experience in Ontario

and to provide better care for Ontarians no matter where they live. What does this mean? It means improving the communication and connections between primary health care providers such as family doctors, nurse practitioners, interprofessional health care teams, hospitals, and home and community care for a smoother patient experience. It means making it easier for patients to try to find a family doctor or nurse practitioner when they need one, to see the provider quickly when they are sick, and to find the care they need closer to home. It means making it easier for doctors, nurses and other primary care providers to connect their patients to the health care that they need. It means ensuring that there's local planning so that health care providers are available to patients where and when they are needed. It means strengthening indigenous and francophone involvement in the planning, design and delivery of health programs and services being provided to their communities.

What's key is that all of this depends on expanding the mandates of the local health integration networks. Fundamentally, this is all about better integration of services across our health care system. That is what LHINs were created to do, and with this bill, if passed, LHINs will be able to plan, fund and integrate health services at the local and sub-regional levels.

I'd like to point out to my colleagues that this legislation is comprehensive; it touches on so many different pieces of existing legislation but is built upon some very basic principles. The first is a more effective integration of services and greater equity. When you look at the heart of what we're doing with this proposed legislation, this is all about better integration of health care services across the system. If your key goal is patient-centred care that puts patients first, then, by definition, all other components of the system need to be working towards that together.

Mr. Hoskins believes and I believe that what patients need and what Ontarians need and deserve is a health care system that is seamless. What does this mean? It means more consistent care for the patients who rely on it. It means good, compassionate care whoever you are, whatever your ethnicity, wherever you live and however much you earn. Nobody disagrees with that; in fact, it is what everybody strives for.

Even though we've built a health care system we can be proud of, there still exist some challenges to the full delivery of integrated, patient-centred care. These challenges, more often than not, boil down to the separation of our various health care services—separation not in what these health services want to accomplish, which is better patient outcomes, but separation in how our health care services are planned and managed.

Right now, LHINs have responsibility for hospitals, long-term-care homes, community services and our mental health and addiction services. They manage all of these locally across their regions, but primary care services are planned and managed in a distinctly different way, and home and community care services and public health services as well—again, planned and managed in

different ways. We can't get to where we want to go with everyone trying to move forward at times in a disconnected way. We need to have somebody lead the integration of services. You have to have somebody who takes responsibility for ensuring that the partners are working together and collaborating. If we have this, we can make sure that we're moving together in the right direction. We can ensure that the various health services we offer are working in coordination with one another, for the specific benefit of Ontario patients.

We all know the disconnect that we hear in our communities between different health services and people being able to access services in another area, transferring and transitioning between different types of care. What we're proposing is to expand the mandate of our 14 LHINs so that they can be the ones who help to coordinate and foster the collaboration that's needed to make sure those services are connected together, that people have access, and that there's a focus on outcomes.

0950

This bill, if passed, would give LHINs responsibility for overseeing primary care planning. It would put them in charge of home and community care delivery and would give them responsibility for developing formal linkages with public health to improve population health planning.

This bill, if passed, would make LHINs the central hubs of our local health care systems, responsible for planning, managing and improving the performance of virtually every aspect of health care in their respective regions. LHINs would be responsible for working with providers across the care continuum to improve access to high-quality and consistent care and to make the system easier to navigate for all Ontarians.

Ontario LHINs have been moving in this direction for years now. They have a mandate to make health care more integrated and responsive to local needs, and they have made some tremendous progress.

I know that in the Champlain region of Ottawa, we've made tremendous progress on wait times in terms of our hips and knees. We've made tremendous progress on youth mental health and addiction and suicide prevention for our young people. This is all a result of local planning, local collaboration and local leadership that has made that very effective and helped to serve the patients of the Champlain region very well.

LHINs have a mandate to make health care more integrated and responsive to local needs. They have run up against the fact that they neither have the official mandate nor tools to integrate all the local health services Ontario offers. If you can't integrate all of your health care services, you can't fully integrate your health care system. We're proposing to give them the mandate and the tools that they need.

If passed, the Patients First Act would give Ontario LHINs responsibility for local health care and make them more accountable to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for their performance.

As part of this process, the LHINs are working to fully establish sub-regions, which would become the focal

point for local planning, service management and delivery. These sub-regions would be places where primary care would be better integrated with home and community care and other local, community-based health services to ensure—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I thought the health minister would be really interested in this. There are five discussions going on on your side when your gentleman is talking. All of the noise is mostly coming from over there. I'd appreciate it if you'd cut it back. If you want to have your little conferences, you know where to go: outside. Thank you.

Continue.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you Speaker.

The point, as I'm sure my colleagues understand, is that if you can localize planning, management and delivery within smaller geographic areas, you can more effectively respond to the health care needs of local communities. That means, across the province, that patients are going to get equitable access to services.

Another principle of this bill is focused on our goal of providing timely access to primary care and seamless links to other services. This is an area where a great deal of work remains to be done in this province. We must work to deliver even more effective primary care, and, because this is integral to the notion of primary care being the gateway to the entire system, that includes delivering primary care that in turn links patients to the other services that they need.

If this bill is passed, LHINs would, in partnership with local clinical leaders, take responsibility for primary care planning and performance management. The ministry would continue to negotiate physician compensation and primary care contracts, but the LHINs would work closely with primary care providers to plan services, undertake human health resources planning, improve access to interprofessional teams for those who need it most and link patients with primary care services.

Mr. Speaker, I think this measure in the proposed legislation will be able to enhance things like advance care planning. We have a challenge in our communities in terms of how people access palliative and end-of-life care, and a lot of that has to do with how our primary care is approaching advance care planning. From my perspective, I think that this measure in the bill will be a very effective tool in working in collaboration with primary care to make sure that people are prepared and understand how to access the system—that the system understand what's important to them. I think this is a really critical part of the bill. I want to stress that this part of the bill is about working in collaboration and partnership, because I think that's what our patients need and deserve from both our physicians and other primary health care providers and the government.

Effectively, LHINs would be the focal point for care planning and care management. We would bring primary care planning much closer to communities where the services are being delivered and to the patients who are

receiving those services. Think about how effective this would be for patients. The LHINs or LHIN sub-regions would engage local clinical leaders. They would monitor performance, identify performance challenges and implement targeted improvements. They would be perfectly placed to improve patient access to interprofessional teams. They would also be responsible for recruitment planning in partnership with local clinician leaders, and each LHIN sub-region would have a process to match unattached patients with a primary care provider.

This isn't about telling patients which doctor they can see or taking patients away from doctors. Quite the contrary, it's about ensuring that every patient who wants a family doctor or a nurse practitioner can have one. Our government takes a great deal of pride in the progress that we've made to help ensure that patients have access to primary care services.

The Patients First Act is also focused on delivering more consistent and accessible home and community care. What we propose to do is to give LHINs responsibility for the management and service delivery of home and community care. We would transfer direct responsibility for service management and delivery from the community care access centres, which currently undertake work for the LHINs. These LHINs would govern and manage the delivery of home and community care. This would mean that CCAC boards would cease to exist and that all CCAC functions, as well as those CCAC employees who provide client support, would be transferred over to the LHINs. This also means the transition would be seamless for the patient. Former CCAC employees would continue to provide care coordination, and home care services would still be provided by current service providers. Continuity of care is a top priority.

What this transition would do is allow the LHINs to further integrate home and community care with our hospitals and primary care providers. Our home and community care workers are going to be better connected with doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses and other health professionals, working together to put patients first.

And, Speaker, I need to be very clear. The decision to transfer our CCACs into the LHINs is not a reflection on their work, because they have done some great work. In 2015-16, over 646,000 Ontarians received home care from CCACs. CCACs have delivered home care in this province to tens of thousands of people in tens of thousands of places every day. And, in that year, 2015-16, approximately 210,000 people were able to return home from hospital with CCAC care. That year, Ontario CCACs delivered 28.7 million hours in personal support and homemaking visits, 6.9 million hours in nursing visits and 1.7 million hours in therapy visits.

CCAC employees have worked hard to provide services to Ontarians for many, many years, and we look forward to those employees continuing to work with the LHINs to improve home and community care, which includes implementing the Roadmap to Strengthen Home and Community Care.

Another way the Patients First Act, if passed, would help improve our health care system is by strengthening

the links between population and public health, and other health services. Again, it's a question of bringing forward all of our health services together on the same team, with patients the main focus.

This bill, if passed, would integrate local population and public health planning with other services by formalizing the linkages between LHINs and public health units. This would create a formal relationship between the medical officers of health and each LHIN, so that they can engage with each other and work on planning together.

I know that in my community of Ottawa, we're very fortunate. Our Chief Medical Officer of Health has actually worked quite closely with many of the health partners to address things like youth addiction and teen suicide, and understood that that was a population health problem. We need to do that across Ontario. We need to have that kind of system collaboration and co-operation. I want to thank Dr. Isra Levy for his leadership in that regard.

By engaging the medical officers of health, it would allow us to ensure that public health services are being directed to the people who need them most. Because right now, unfortunately, the people who need them most are those who experience the most significant barriers to access.

1000

Linkages between LHINs, public health and other health services would allow for joint planning activities and greater consistency of service. We know there are disparities in the capacity of some of the local public health units, and further integrating local health care systems would allow us to reduce and even eliminate those gaps.

Speaker, those are the four areas of focus. I want to make it clear that in all of these areas, our goal is to simplify and improve the patient experience. Through this plan, there would be no added bureaucracy, and any financial savings would go to improving patient care.

We would undertake any changes carefully and in collaboration with our health care partners to make sure that patients have ongoing, smooth access to the health care services they depend on, and we would update patients, caregivers and partners all along the way.

I also want to add that our government will continue working with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban indigenous partners and health providers to ensure that their voices are heard, in particular with respect to equitable access to services that meet their unique needs. Our indigenous partners have been very clear for some time that there's a real need for a respectful engagement process to help address the unique relationships between indigenous peoples and the health care system. I would like to echo the comments made by Minister Hoskins, that we're committed to meaningful engagement with our indigenous partners and we're following through on that commitment through parallel processes that will collaboratively identify what is needed for responsive and transformative change.

Should this legislation pass, we would be moving forward with the meaningful and productive engagement that is geared to achieving results and improving patient outcomes.

It might also interest my colleagues, as the minister said, that we had some considerable time over the summer to take a look at the direction of the bill and take the input of stakeholders. With some of the changes that we have made and incorporated into this bill that has been put forward, it would be very clear that the proposed directive powers over hospitals for operations and new policies, and the proposed power to appoint a supervisor over a hospital, would only be at the minister's discretion.

It would be clear that the LHIN oversight of primary care providers, including physicians, would be to support collaboration between the LHINs and primary care providers.

And it is extremely important that it would recognize the importance of French-language services provision and enhance more equitably access to health care services for the francophone community.

Speaker, I don't have much time left. I simply want to say that this bill proposes a great many benefits for health care in Ontario. I'm very proud to support it, and thank my colleagues for their time and attention.

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

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I'm proud to rise today to represent my constituents in Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry.

We talk about the bill resulting in a much larger bureaucracy. We're not seeing the dollars get to the patients. This year, we hear about the 1% increase in hospital funding. It sounds great, but when it gets to the actual hospitals, they're seeing in many cases an actual reduction in funding. At one of my hospitals in particular, it's almost a million-dollar cut, when you look at the whole funding envelope. Money is not getting to the hospitals.

When I look at some of the increases they have had, of course, salaries—hydro has not had as big an impact in the city of Cornwall, because at Cornwall Electric, we're somewhat insulated. But out in the rural areas—we're serviced by two hospitals, one in Alexandria and one in Winchester—they're not so lucky. They're seeing significant increases in energy costs that has to come out of that million-dollar loss.

You can see the challenges. Wages are up. What we're seeing, in talking to various doctors, is actually a cut in hours. In operating rooms, the lights are turned off. Doctors who are working somewhat close to the US border are crossing the border into the States. They're providing hours of office time in the States, in Massena. One orthopedic surgeon says he won't take any more knee surgeries because there's such a long wait.

We're not seeing these actions on the ground. We're seeing more delays. I see residents in my riding coming to Toronto because the wait times are shorter. These are

problems right across the province, and we need to see some results.

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

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I listened intently to the presentation by the various ministers. The last speaker, the member from Ottawa Centre, did a pretty good job in getting into some of the specifics. I think he did the best job, actually. Unfortunately, the minister was really vague in his presentation. I didn't hear any specifics—a lot of platitudes, a lot of integration- and collaboration-type words. We've heard these all before when it comes to the LHIN and we haven't seen the net benefit in our communities.

I'll tell you about some of the challenges that we have at our local hospitals: nurses that have been laid off, front-line-care workers that aren't able to deliver the care that's needed in our emergency hospitals. We've got a resurgence of nurses coming back to Windsor for work from all parts. They're coming back to Windsor for jobs. Guess where they're working? At Beaumont Hospital in Michigan and at Henry Ford hospital in Michigan because there have been such drastic cuts to our health care system in Ontario that they can't get a job. These are nurses that have been educated here in Ontario, are fully certified and fully ready to contribute to our health care system but can't get a job due to the cuts—juxtaposed with a federal government that is now going to slash even more than the Harper government did.

We need a Minister of Health that is going to advocate for true support from the federal level—true accountability. Undoubtedly, this bill comes on the heels of an Auditor General report where we saw that the CCACs spent 40% of their budget on administrative costs, nearly \$1 billion a year. We know that's why this is coming forward, but it does nothing to support front-line care. We've got home care workers who are barely making minimum wage. You can't provide quality service to people in this province if you're not going to pay the people correctly and you're relying on private care providers. There are systems out there that are better than this, and we expect better than this from the government of Ontario.

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, following the other member. We have seen very robust salary increases for physicians and for nurses—I live with a nurse who's rather remarkable—and we're now lifting up the wages of PSWs at an unprecedented level. It's interesting because my partner, Rick, served in the Canadian Armed Forces, so he's seen some pretty difficult work situations and been on the front lines in some fairly ugly situations in his life. But he's worked in a number of provincial health care systems. He's an operating room nurse and describes this system here as phenomenal.

My mother has had several battles with cancer in this system, and she has lived in three provinces. I have never

seen this standard of care. Our health care workers are extraordinary—the capacity. Her drug costs, from Manitoba and Quebec, are a fraction of what they are as a senior. She lives two blocks away. She's 89 years old—in about two weeks—and she lives independently. That says something. For all the carping about that, I can tell you the health care system in this province, I think, is, if not the best in the world, one of the best in the world.

I have had the privilege of living in a few other places. I also know, in Manitoba—I was mayor of the city of Winnipeg—my partner had a heavier work schedule as a nurse because of the amount of overtime. I almost never saw him. He was working mayor's hours—and I worked seven days a week, one of the big stresses in our lives. It's great, now, that I'm here. We actually get to take vacations together again because his workload here is so much more reasonable, and since he works in neurosurgery—you really don't want someone who's working in spine and neuro not to be well rested.

So I think we have good conditions. It's not perfect. We've still got huge challenges. Our nurses, particularly—I'm overwhelmed—are amazing. I used to do AIDS education in fly-in communities. If you have ever seen—in northern remote communities, nurses do everything. Those nurses—I take my hat off to them. They are a remarkable group of professionals. I think we should be thankful for—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. The member from Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to add my comments to the debate this morning with regard to this particular bill. I have some questions on it because I always get a little nervous when I take a look at a bill that—this particular bill affects 19 other acts. I heard the minister talk about consultation—19 other acts. Sometimes I often think that there may be poison pills in there because it's a case where there might be some components, several components, that we may agree with, but there may be some other elements of it that we don't agree with, as an opposition.

Having said that, then suddenly we're the bad guys because, of the 19 acts, there may be one or two that we've got some issues on; the others, well, good for the government. So I do have a concern with that.

The title of this bill is maybe somewhat misleading. I understand what the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care wants to do; hence, a nice title: "Patients First." I always have concerns in our health care because we need to take a lot of the money and flatten some of the organizations. When I say flatten, I'm not talking about job elimination, but in flattening an organization, we need to put more money down to the front line. I'm sure that that's what the minister's intentions are, but, again, I'm concerned about that.

We've even had discussions about hospitals and what I would call "empire building" and how, again, we need to take those dollars that are maybe rich at the top and push them down to the front line where we can hire more front-line workers, because health care, obviously, is the biggest expenditure in our government this day.

Again, we have some serious concerns and hopefully that can get sorted out in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): One of the three speakers has two minutes.

The member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, the member from Essex, the Minister of the Environment and the member from Chatham–Kent–Essex. I appreciate the member from Essex and his comments. I do think the minister did a good job, though. I don't think it was vague. I just want to add my two cents. I couldn't have made it more clear myself.

We all know in our offices about the health care system. We all know about its successes and its shortcomings. We all know that. The thing that we have to focus on is what we know is a challenge, and that is the connectedness that patients feel to the services that they need. Right now we have a health care organization, LHINs, which have had success. They still have some challenges, but they've had, in different areas, different successes—in my area, successes with hips and knees, success around mental health and around palliative care, because they've brought a focus and leadership to integrating those services.

It's critical that it's local. We all represent local areas, and to say that we should not give more power or more responsibility—maybe that's a better way of putting it—to those local entities for taking care of those things that are most important to people—I think in this Legislature I would be surprised if everybody said, "Let's just put it all in downtown Toronto." I don't think I could find too many people, except maybe a few people from downtown Toronto—

Interjection.

Mr. John Fraser: Even the people from downtown Toronto.

I look forward to the debate on this bill. I think it's a critical piece of legislation. It does change 19 acts; I do take the member's—when we're changing a lot of acts, that's something that takes some time; you want to be able to debate. This is the second time this bill has been introduced, and I think that we'll have a healthy debate on this. I look forward to it, and I thank all of the members for their comments.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Rick Nicholls: In the west members' gallery this morning, it's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Tom Madden, senior vice-president of Young America, located in Minneapolis. Just last week, they opened up a new office in my hometown of Chatham, Ontario, called YA Canada, employing over 140 people.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I see up in the east gallery this morning Barbara Higgins, from my riding. She's the mother of page Elisabeth Lawton. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome students from St. Augustine Catholic High School in Markham, on both sides of the public gallery.

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'd like to introduce to the assembly today Elizabeth Drummond and her daughter, Margaret Sands, from my riding, here to visit for question period. Please welcome them.

Mr. Joe Dickson: I'm pleased to introduce, in the east gallery this morning, on the far right, the gentleman with his cowboy boots on, who is the horse trainer and owner and president of the quarter horse racing association of Ontario, who race at Ajax Downs in my constituency.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Today being Breast Reconstruction Awareness Day, I'm pleased to welcome staff and volunteers from Rethink Breast Cancer to the gallery. They're up there. Thank you, ladies. Rethink's mission is to empower young people worldwide who are concerned about and affected by breast cancer. Welcome.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'd like you all to join me in welcoming to the Ontario Legislature and to Ontario Jitske Bosma, who is a high school student in the Netherlands and is spending a two-week part of her bilingual English program visiting us at Treasury Board and working at Treasury Board.

From my office at Treasury Board, joining her this morning, are Aisling MacKnight, my scheduler, and Ben Charlebois, our MPP liaison.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. The member from Thornhill.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thornhill. I did say Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Oh, sorry. I just want to say that on their way today are Rabbi Yirmi Cohen, his son, Mendy, and his daughter, Chaya. They're here to celebrate the holiday of Sukkot, to do the blessing, the bracha, the lulav and the etrog. Chag sameach, everybody. It's Sukkot this week.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I have two members of my family here in the Legislature today who I would like to introduce: my sister, Susan Houghton, who has been here before, and my dear cousin Stewart Goodings, from British Columbia. Welcome to both of you.

Mr. Todd Smith: After a record-setting summer for tourism in Prince Edward county, I'd like to welcome the mayor of Prince Edward county, Robert Quaiff, who joins us today in the west members' gallery.

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

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted that we're joined today by the president of Lakehead University, Dr. Brian Stevenson, and Richard Longtin is here too. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'd like to introduce Brock Wunderlich, who is a co-op student—we were speaking

of students earlier—working in the government caucus. He has a particular interest in the environment and is an environment and business major from Wilfrid Laurier University. Welcome, Brock. Good to have you with us here.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I am pleased to rise today and to let you know that a page from my riding of Halton, Riya Karumanchi, is page captain today. I want to welcome her mother, Radhika Daggubati, to Queen's Park and to the Legislature.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It is a great honour for me to introduce the family of page captain Suryakant Jain, on behalf of the member from Etobicoke North. Please welcome Suryakant's mother, Sonali Verma, and uncle, Anant Sagar, who are visiting Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions? If not, I have some.

I'm not sure he's here yet, but I am welcoming a personal guest of mine: in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. James Muir, the wine master and maître d' at the CN Tower. We're glad he's with us. He will give anyone lessons on wine if you want them.

Also in the Speaker's gallery we have with us a delegation from the National People's Congress of China, led by the chairman of the Canada-China Legislative Association, Mr. Chi Wanchun. Accompanying them is the Honourable Victor Oh, Senator in Ottawa. Victor, welcome. We warmly welcome the entire delegation from China. Thank you for being here.

I could also like to introduce, and please join me in welcoming, the family and friends of the late Cynthia Maria Nicholas, MPP for Scarborough Centre during the 34th Parliament, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: her daughter, Leahanne LeGrow, her former husband, Ray LeGrow, and family and friends. We welcome our guests today.

Accompanying that delegation we have with us Mr. Steven Mahoney, MPP for Mississauga West during the 35th Parliament. Welcome, Steven.

CINDY NICHOLAS

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I believe you will find we have unanimous consent to recognize the former member for Scarborough Centre, Cynthia Maria Nicholas, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute to a former member. Do we agree? Agreed.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm honoured today, on behalf of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, to pay tribute to the late Cindy Nicholas.

Cindy served as a Liberal member of the Legislative Assembly, representing the riding of Scarborough Centre from 1987 to 1990. She also served as the parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General from 1989 to 1990. This

was a time, Speaker, when debates centred on victims' rights, children and families within the justice system, and the Special Investigations Unit.

I'm not certain what sparked her interest in politics, but it might have happened in 1983. That year, she was named as special adviser to the late Supreme Court Justice John Sopinka, who chaired the William Davis government's Task Force on Equal Opportunity in Athletics. The report was an analysis of physical activities for boys and girls in Ontario's public school system, noting that boys were more advantaged than girls in sports and exercise in Ontario and concluding that there should be greater equality. Her contributions to that task force helped set the tone for the changes that would come in the decades ahead.

Before politics, she made her mark in competitive marathon swimming—first, at the young age of 16 years old. In 1974, she matched Marilyn Bell's 1954 crossing of a wind-swept Lake Ontario, and she did it in a record time of 15 hours and 10 minutes. Her little group, which included her father and a Globe and Mail reporter, departed from Youngstown, New York, at 2 a.m. on the morning of August 16. Except for family and friends and, of course, the intrepid Globe reporter, no one knew of the attempt. They were armed only with a 10-foot wooden dinghy, a compass, a 10-horsepower outboard motor and some leftovers from the refrigerator. It wasn't until they were spotted the next morning by a passing pilot that news spread and she was accompanied by a flotilla to Exhibition Place in Toronto.

1040

This was a time in our history, Speaker, when Canadians were searching for heroes, and her fame spread instantly. As she said in 2005 at her induction ceremony into the international hall of fame, "I became a celebrity overnight." She also said at that time that the swim "would have to be the highlight of my career because it was the first time doing a long swim." But Speaker, her swimming exploits did not end on the shoreline of Lake Ontario. She went on to cross the English Channel 19 times and held the women's record for the crossing until 1988. She was known as the queen of the channel from 1987 to 1992.

Cindy became a lawyer in Scarborough after obtaining her degrees at the universities of Toronto and Windsor. She received numerous awards, including being made a member of the Order of Canada in 1979, inducted into the sports hall of fame in 2003 and the swimming hall of fame in 2005.

In addition, Cindy was the first recipient of the Scarborough Award of Merit and was honoured with a star on the Scarborough Walk of Fame in 2006. Now, each year, the local community recognizes her contributions with the annual Cindy Nicholas Swim Classic, marking 40 years in 2017. And her dream of an Olympic pool at the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus was finally realized in 2015.

She loved her community and the people there who sought her help. She was a member of the youth employ-

ment project advisory committee and the sports head injury inquiry, and she also served on many other community and charitable boards, overall improving the lives of so many residents, Speaker, so many residents. Michael Read, the Channel Swimming Association president, said, "She was an incredible swimmer, her achievements were seemingly endless and well-deserved, a lovely and charming person and a great inspiration to all who were lucky enough to meet her."

Cindy Nicholas was a national and local hero. She was a passionate champion for sport and for Scarborough, always proud of her roots. To Cindy's family, Cindy leaves a tremendous legacy to the province as well as to Canada, and for that we're extremely grateful.

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

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is always our honour to stand in this proud Legislature and talk about issues that matter to the people of Ontario. Sometimes, like today, we have the opportunity to stand and speak about individuals who have mattered to us provincially and personally. I am honoured to stand and pay tribute and remember Cindy Nicholas.

First, I would like to welcome her family and friends to the Legislature today. Welcome to Leahanne LeGrow and her father, Raymond LeGrow. They are joined today by Cindy's cousins Gail Wheeler and Pam Dornan, and friends Marsha Simmonds and Shoshana Teitelman. Welcome to Queen's Park.

When we pay tribute to former MPPs, it is a chance to remember them, to recognize their work and celebrate their lasting impact. It is also a special chance to connect with their loved ones. Thank you to Cindy's only daughter, Leahanne, for sharing some of her very special memories.

Many of us remember Cindy Nicholas as being the legendary and record-breaking marathon open water swimmer. Cindy swam across Lake Ontario from Youngstown, New York to the CNE in Toronto when she was just 16 years old. She dived into the lake at 16 and in that moment into the public eye. She was the very first woman to complete a nonstop two-way crossing of the English Channel in 1977, finishing with the fastest time of any male or female swimmer. She was known as the queen of the channel because she swam the channel 19 times.

Cindy was well-recognized for her athletic achievement, being named top female athlete of the year in 1977 and given the Bobbie Rosenfeld Award. She was made a member of the Order of Canada in 1979 and was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame in 1993, inducted into the Ontario Sports Hall of Fame in 2003, and into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 2005.

She always liked to swim, and was a very competitive person and wanted to be good at everything. She was always encouraged by her father, Jim, and her parents were wonderful supporters and made sure she had all the opportunities she could. Throughout Cindy's life, whenever she was in the water, they were right alongside her in the boat.

It seemed that her father also really enjoyed Cindy's opportunities. She was in law school and her father said, "Cindy, there is an opportunity for a race in Egypt." But Cindy said, "Daddy, I don't really want to swim in the Nile." But Dad thought Egypt was a pretty neat opportunity, and she did end up swimming in the Nile, with him alongside her, which does sound like a pretty special adventure.

Cindy was very close to her parents. She grew up in Scarborough, in Cliffcrest. She grew up there, made lifelong friends there, worked there and knew she wanted to represent it. She was elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1987, to serve her neighbours and constituents in the riding of Scarborough Centre. She was a Liberal MPP who served as parliamentary assistant to the Solicitor General from 1989 to 1990.

Cindy was elected in 1987, and Leahanne was born in 1988. While she doesn't remember much from that time, her very first family picture was proudly taken on the steps of Queen's Park. Cindy remembered fondly that she used to tote Leahanne around with her. When the bells would ring and she would have to come into the chamber, she would have to hand Leahanne off to whoever was closest, and afterwards come out of the chamber and have to ask, "Who's got Leahanne?"

Apparently, even back in the late 1980s, traffic was a challenge. Cindy and Leahanne spent a lot of time sitting on the DVP, singing songs in the car.

Cindy loved her community. There were about four blocks between her home and constituency office, and another block to her parents'. She actively and wholeheartedly represented her riding. She was always proud of her time at Queen's Park, and at the end of her term in 1990, she continued to be an active participant in her community. She was a lawyer, and her office was right around the corner from the grocery store and her church, and she couldn't go anywhere without connecting with someone. She was well known and well respected by her clients and neighbours. She inspired others. Scarborough thought so much of her, and she thought so much of her community.

Cindy became a member of the Scarborough Walk of Fame at the Scarborough Town Centre in 2006, as one of the first people recognized for sports achievement. She was later on the nomination committee, because she grew up there. She knew the community, and she wanted to be active in recognizing the good folks from the area who deserved recognition for making Scarborough great.

She was so proud of the community and wanted big things for it. In fact, she always said they needed a bigger pool in the east end. She was so excited to finally see that happen with the Pan Am centre.

Cindy always had big goals, a big heart, but also a big pool. Generally, people have about a 30-foot pool, but their family pool in Cliffcrest was a 52-footer. She never lost her love of swimming, and in her retirement, she still swam a couple of miles a day.

She continued to give back and connect. She dedicated much of her time to her dear mother, Victoria, and to

volunteering across Scarborough, appreciating the needs and strengths across the community she knew so well and loved so much.

Cindy Nicholas was sadly lost to her family, community and to the province too soon, at the age of 58, after a battle with cancer. Thank you to her family and friends for sharing her with us. We offer our sincerest condolences.

Those who knew Cindy in real life are richer for knowing her, and those who knew Cindy as larger than life were inspired by her. Cindy Nicholas dived into our hearts at 16, made waves throughout her life, and her love, strength and authentic spirit will forever send ripples throughout our province.

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

Hon. Brad Duguid: I am very, very honoured to have the privilege to rise today to speak and pay tribute to a Canadian hero, a good, long-time friend of mine, a former legislator and somebody who I can only describe as an incredibly, incredibly nice person.

On these occasions, our Legislature comes together in mutual respect and admiration for those who have contributed so much to our society, to us and to future generations. For the most part, we tend to acknowledge those that have left public life and have often gone on to some form of retirement prior to their passing. Unfortunately, today we're here to pay tribute to Cindy Nicholas, former MPP for Scarborough Centre, who left us far too young.

1050

I would like to acknowledge those—they've already been acknowledged—who are in the audience today: her daughter, Leahanne LeGrow; her former husband, Ray LeGrow; her cousins Gail and Michael Wheeler, Pam Dornan, Ryan Wheeler; and some of her close friends who are here; as well as a friend and former colleague in this Legislature, Steve Mahoney. I want to thank them for being here as well.

I had the privilege and opportunity to connect with Cindy's mother, Victoria, at Cindy's memorial earlier this summer. I was actually somewhat surprised to learn that she remembered this young kid from Scarborough in her living room with a number of my political friends, on behalf of the then opposition leader David Peterson, trying to convince Cindy and her family that running for a provincial seat in Scarborough would actually be a good idea. I've got to tell you that while that first try was unsuccessful at getting Cindy to run, I recall that there was no doubt in our minds whatsoever that Cindy had a very strong desire to serve the public. Three years later, indeed, she did answer that call.

In many ways, she had been serving in public life for her entire adult life—and really her teenage life as well when you think about it. Public office was really just the next step in what I would call a lifetime of service to Scarborough, to Ontario, to Canada, and, frankly, to the world.

We all know that Cindy Nicholas was a truly accomplished long-distance swimmer, and my colleagues have

spoken about some of her incredible feats. Her accomplishments in the water are frankly unrivalled, and they're unrivalled to this day. She defied the impossible. At age 16, as was mentioned, she swam Lake Ontario in just over 15 hours. I think that was a record at the time.

Through the years, she swam the English Channel, as was mentioned—I find this absolutely incredible—19 times, earning the title of Queen of the Channel. She was also the first woman to complete a two-way crossing of the Channel, and she did that in the quickest result ever for a male or a female. Again, that's something that would have been seen at the time as absolutely impossible.

She was unsurprisingly named the top Canadian athlete in 1977 and she earned that Bobbie Rosenfeld Award. She was named a member of the Order of Canada, as was mentioned, in 1979. She is, of course, in both Canada's and the Ontario Sports Halls of Fame, and of course she's in the International Swimming Hall of Fame. I don't think there was ever a doubt, probably from the time she was 16, that she wouldn't be getting those honours.

Two of the honours that were mentioned by my colleague from Whitby–Oshawa were the honour of the Scarborough Award of Merit and the Scarborough Walk of Fame. I was with her during those ceremonies. I know how proud she was of those as well because she really was a true champion of her home community in Scarborough.

When I think about it, Cindy's real accomplishments didn't just come in the pool, in the lake or in the Channel. They went far beyond that. Cindy was an inspiration to generations of Canadians of what could be achieved through perseverance, through training and determination.

At the same time, Cindy was unique for a sports celebrity. She never, ever lost her humble Scarborough youthful innocence. To call her "Scarborough's Sweetheart" nowadays might be considered borderline sexist, but that's what she was referred to, back in the 1970s and 1980s, often in the media. Really, that was in response to the fact that this great athlete and this strong and determined role model was an incredibly kind and caring human being at the very inner core of her being.

Yes, she worked here at Queen's Park between 1987 and 1990, and she served on many committees and as a parliamentary assistant to a couple of ministers during her time here. But again, what made Cindy stand out at Queen's Park wasn't her legislative achievements as much as it was the fact that she always maintained her Cindy Nicholas kind and sweet personality. The cut and thrust of partisan debate simply never had a place with Cindy Nicholas. Her ability to come across as "just Cindy" was always noted by her constituents, Ontarians and her colleagues—Steve Mahoney would remember—and I think all of us in this Legislature, many of whom had very close connections with Cindy.

And so, I say on behalf of all of us today, on this side of the House and on all sides of the House, Cindy Nicholas is missed and will always be missed by all who

knew her. We thank and acknowledge her loved ones—many of them are here today; some of them couldn't be here. I hope that today's celebration of Cindy's life brings you comfort in her premature loss, and I hope that the reflections that you've heard in this Legislature today that we've all had the opportunity and the privilege to share with you—reflections of Cindy's huge accomplishments and of her as the person that she was—bring smiles to your faces as well today, along with pride in having been such an important part of her life, as she was an important part of all of ours: all Ontarians, all Canadians.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to thank all members for their thoughtful, kind and heartfelt comments regarding the life of Cindy. We would also like to thank the family for the gift of Cindy. Knowing that it always is a sacrifice, and that we would make sure that our tributes today are felt for you in times to come, we will provide you with a DVD and a copy of the Hansard for this testimonial. Thank you very much.

ORAL QUESTIONS

HYDRO REBATES

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. It was revealed yesterday that the government spent nearly \$12 million on contracts to friends and self-promotion through the Ontario Electricity Support Program. They doled out over \$9 million to high-priced consultants and another \$2.5 million to their ad man. That money was supposed to go to low-income families struggling to pay their hydro bills.

Speaker, can the Premier please justify spending nearly \$12 million on consultants and self-promotional ads when families are struggling to make a choice between putting food on the table and heating their homes?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just as an indicator, I'm going to deal with this as quickly as possible. The Minister of Children and Youth Services will come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We created the Ontario energy support program to help people who were struggling with their electricity bills, people who live on low incomes. We wanted to make sure and we want to make sure that everyone in the province who's eligible for this program will know about it and will understand how to access it.

Right now, there are 145,000 families who, since the program was launched 10 months ago, have signed up for the program and are receiving support and are therefore paying lower electricity bills. It's beyond me why the Conservatives would attack a program that is actually designed to help people with their electricity bills. This is a—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've made it clear that I will be seeking attention for both questions and answers. If it starts up as soon as I sit down, I'll get whoever decided to challenge.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: This is a \$225 million program, Mr. Speaker, and \$12 million to do the public education is a small fraction of that amount.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Well, 145,000 is less than a third of those eligible. The people are waiting, but your friends have done very well.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, the Minister of Education, the President of the Treasury Board and the Deputy Premier will come to order. And the list will grow.

Please finish.

Mr. John Yakabuski: There's not a day goes by where I don't hear another hydro horror story: another family struggling to keep the lights on, a senior who can't afford their medications or to pay their bills. We hear all of those stories over and over again, and this government has the gall, the audacity, to spend \$12 million on high-priced consultants and self-promotional ads. This government knows no bounds.

Can the Premier tell every senior struggling to pay their hydro bills or for their medication that paying consultants was more important than their welfare?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the member for the question. He makes the point that it is very important that people who are struggling with their electricity bills have access to support.

1100

There are some 300,000 people in the province who still would qualify for the Ontario energy support program—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and we need to make sure that they know about that program. So what we have done is we have put advertisements in print and radio and bus shelters—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Next time I stand, we'll go to warnings. The member from Leeds–Grenville: second time.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We have put notices in ODSP and Ontario Works cheques; inserts from local utilities with their bills; partnerships with food banks and libraries, and MPP offices. So I hope that the MPP has a poster in his office and helps people in his constituency to find out about the program.

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: The inserts cost next to nothing. The ads of \$2.5 million were for your self-pro-

motion. What I can't understand is why this rebate wasn't automatically given to those in need. Why were they forced to apply? Why waste \$12 million? But the Premier and minister think this \$12 million was worth it, or, as the minister said yesterday, that it was "money well spent."

If the Liberals think that it was better to spend on consultants and ads, they should have no problem releasing the details. Speaker, will the Premier commit today to release every contract and the details—disclose all the details—of how this \$12 million was spent?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I said, the money that was spent to put in place a public education campaign was very necessary because there are 500,000 families in the province who would be eligible. About 145,000 families are now in the program, so that means there are still more families who would qualify.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows perfectly well that utilities do not have personal income information, so it was necessary to set in place a program approach that allowed people to apply. I hope that the member opposite is letting his constituents know about this program. It's very important. The opposition has said—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We're now moving to warnings. The member from Huron–Bruce and the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, come to order. You're in before the warnings; you're lucky.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The opposition has been more than clear that there are people who are struggling with electricity bills. I hope that they are pointing people who come into their constituency offices in the direction of this program so that those people can get help.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. Due to the rationed health care system, wait times in south-western Ontario are increasing and patients are suffering. Last year, I informed the House that hip and knee replacement surgeries were completely cancelled during the months of January to April due to lack of funds.

Constituents like Ruby and Betty in my riding need to travel over an hour to Strathroy for knee replacement surgery. However, they both received letters from their surgeons this past week: "Our funding that we received for this fiscal year of April 2016 through till March of 2017 has reached its maximum, and therefore, we are not able to book any further patients for total knee or total hip replacements for this fiscal year."

Speaker, we're only six months into this fiscal year and they've already run out of money. Constituents like Ruby and Betty are suffering because of this rationed care. When will the Premier step in and ensure that health care funding lasts year-round?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. We know that when it comes to surgical procedures in this

province, for most surgeries we have the shortest wait time, or among the shortest wait times, in all of Canada. But there are areas—we have to be frank about this—where we need to continue to make further improvements. Also, we need to make sure that that success is well distributed across the province.

We do expect our hospitals, when they are provided with an allocation, to manage that allocation responsibly and actually spread it over the course of the year, because there are many surgical procedures that demand those OR times. We expect and look to our hospital officials and leadership to be able to manage those allocations appropriately. We do that using an evidence-based approach and a scientific approach to make sure that people do have access when they do need that access.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. Life is getting harder for Doug Price. The frail 73-year-old needs replacement surgery on his knee today. Sadly, he can't have it and he won't get it for at least another year. His wife, Doris, faced the same predicament when she was told to wait a year for her cataract surgery.

Delayed and cancelled surgeries are skyrocketing across our province as a result of this Liberal government's scandal, waste and mismanagement. Mr. Speaker, it's unacceptable that this government can't fund surgeries for patients, like Doug Price, who are in constant pain and unable to leave their home.

Why haven't the Premier and the minister acted on this crisis situation and found a solution so that patients can get the needed surgeries as soon as possible?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We increased the budgets of our hospitals this year by more than 2%, and we continue to make investments, and we often do that. So there's the base funding that we provide hospitals, but also, to reduce wait times, we specifically allocate funds across this province. We do that generally through what's called a quality-based procedure, where we provide that funding to hospitals that have proven their efficiency, their effectiveness in delivering these services as well. It's a system that has actually seen pretty dramatic improvements over just a number of years, so we can be proud of how we're situated vis-à-vis the rest of the country. But we know that there's more work to be done.

In fact, for the South West LHIN, as an example, we provided them with significant new funding specifically for hip and knee surgery this fiscal year.

We're working closely with the LHIN in South West and in other parts of the province to be able to manage those challenges—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary, the member for Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Premier. We are joined today by Rethink Breast Cancer, which is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to empower those who are concerned about and affected by breast cancer. They have been advocating for improved

access to breast reconstruction for women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer and those who are at high risk of getting it.

According to a report they published earlier this year, Ontario currently has a one- to two-year wait-list for breast reconstruction surgery. This is simply unacceptable and harmful to breast cancer survivors. Manitoba, by contrast, has wait times of only up to six months for the same procedure. Fully half of physicians in Ontario surveyed say they are dissatisfied with the patient wait times for breast reconstruction, and 80% of those surveyed felt a lack of operating room time was the biggest contributor to the long wait times.

Will the Premier commit to immediately increasing surgical resources in the province, such as OR time, so that women suffering from breast cancer can get back to living their lives normally?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I particularly appreciate this question. I want to thank—I know we have individuals in the gallery—Rethink Breast Cancer for their recent paper which highlights the challenges that are faced.

This is such an important issue, Mr. Speaker, that we need to make further progress on this. In April of this year—and I think this was one of the problems: The reconstruction, whether it's prophylactic or whether it's following surgery for cancer, wasn't governed or managed by Cancer Care Ontario. In April of this year, we made that change as a result. So we've had an expert panel looking at precisely this challenge, because it is unacceptably long for women who have to go through this traumatic physical and mental procedure—the challenges that they're facing. We're obligated to make sure that we're providing a better system and better support for them, and we're making the changes to deliver just that.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH INFORMATION

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's particularly my pleasure to direct my question to the Premier today, on Persons Day, the day that, 87 years ago, women were actually included in the definition of being a "person" in this country.

I'll continue with the actual question, Speaker.

Ontarians are very proud of our health care system and they want to know that it's going to be there for their kids and for the next generations, but they're very, very worried about privatization.

The Premier has made some comments, and I just need to be firmly sure of where this Liberal government is going, and so I'm going to ask the Premier to tell us clearly: Is privatization of any or all of our eHealth assets on the table for this Liberal government?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just acknowledge that the leader of the third party was at the LEAF Persons Day breakfast this morning with a number of her colleagues and a number of mine, and thank her and thank everyone who has supported LEAF over the years as they

work to make sure that the law works for women and not against women. Happy Persons Day, everyone.

1110

Mr. Speaker, as I have said, as the Deputy Premier has said, personal health information—eHealth—is not for sale, not now and not ever.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Last week, the government asked Ed Clark to figure out how much money our eHealth assets are worth. Now they insist that all they want to do is strengthen health care. But you don't improve health care by asking how much you can get to sell off a hospital, and you don't need to know the sale price of eHealth in order to be able to improve it.

Why should Ontarians trust this Premier that she isn't privatizing our eHealth assets?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To reiterate, there is no possibility of a sale or the commercialization of people's health information. In fact, what I asked Ed Clark to do last week was to value the assets, to actually take an inventory of what has been created by eHealth over roughly the past decade—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm trying to remember. Did I say we're into warnings?

Interjections: Yes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I just needed that reminder.

Carry on.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Given that the current mandate of eHealth is due to conclude at December of next year, I think it's prudent to do an inventory of the assets, to value those assets, to understand what assets have been created across this province. We know that others, like Canada Health Infoway, have done this. We want to do that to leverage those assets going forward, to build an even stronger digital health strategy and system.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, I'm more worried than I was when I got up to ask these questions in the first place. That's the same language this government used when they talked about selling off Hydro One: "leveraging the assets."

Look, it wasn't that long ago that this Premier refused to admit that Hydro One was even for sale in the province of Ontario. In fact, she still insists that Hydro One isn't being sold. She calls it "broadening the ownership," even though everybody knows what the truth is.

When the Liberals ask Ed Clark to figure out the sale price of our eHealth assets, and then turn around and say they won't sell anything, it doesn't pass the smell test, especially when they're now talking about leveraging that very asset.

We've seen more than 10 years of privatization by this Liberal government in the health care sector, and we cannot take any more. Why is this Premier so interested

in how much money she can get for our public eHealth assets?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: It doesn't matter how many times she tries to say it. eHealth is not for sale. eHealth is not for sale.

What we're doing is we're actually looking at what has been created over roughly the past decade. We're moving into a new phase of a strategy where we're going to be able to provide better support for consumer-facing eHealth and digital health systems. We're going to build on the fact that 80% of family doctors across this province are already using eHealth and that most diagnostic procedures are already digitized. We're going to look at that. It's the prudent thing to do.

The mandate is coming to a conclusion at the end of next year. It's prudent to actually look at what we've got, so we can build an even stronger system going forward.

We will not be selling eHealth.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. But I've got to say that in October 2014, this Premier said she wasn't selling off Hydro One, and look where we are now.

On Monday, I sat down with a woman named Maryse Gareau. Maryse lives in Sudbury with her husband, Chad, and her two beautiful young daughters. Maryse has watched her hydro bills go up by nearly \$100 since the same time last year. The cost of hydro means that they cannot save for their kids' future, and she's concerned about whether she can afford even entering them in before- and after-school programs, like sports, for example.

Like people all across Ontario, the sell-off of Hydro One means life is getting tougher for folks like Maryse, her husband, Chad, and their daughters, and it means it's harder for them to give the future that they want to give to their children. She's actually not putting money away in their RESPs because she's taking that money and using it for her hydro bills.

Will the Premier stop the sell-off of Hydro One so that it doesn't get worse, instead of better, for this family?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I thank the leader of the third party for the question. I know that it serves the leader of the third party's interests to conflate these subjects. I know that she's trying to make a link between electricity prices and the changes with Hydro One.

The reality is that we have made massive investments in the electricity system in Ontario. We have shut down the coal-fired plants. We have built over 10,000 kilometres of line. We've done that so that we could have a clean grid in this province, a reliable grid. There's a cost associated with that, and we've recognized that, so we are working to take costs off of people's bills and help people like Maryse and her family.

We are also working to help a family like that so that they have the supports that they need, whether it's child care—100,000 new child care spaces—or whether it's tuition, making sure that by the time those two kids get to post-secondary, they have the support that they need, whether it's free tuition, if they're low-income, or supports that they need. Those are the kinds of things we're doing to support families in the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Minister of Energy, the MPP for Sudbury, stood right here in this House and said, "A 20% reduction for families in rural, remote and northern communities, like in my part of the province, will actually be a significant savings for many families." But people in Sudbury, people in the minister's own riding, people like Maryse and Chad, are not getting those savings. Instead, they're watching their bills go up, and turning Hydro One into a private, for-profit monopoly is only going to make it worse, regardless of what the Premier claims.

We've seen it happen over and over and over in virtually every jurisdiction across North America: When you privatize your electricity system, the costs go up for the public. That's what happens, whether she likes to admit it or not. The question is, will this Premier stop any further sell-off of Hydro One and ensure that people get a break?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise and answer the leader of the third party's question. When it comes to the great riding of Sudbury, we have talked to the families there, and all the families in the great riding of Sudbury will be receiving that 8% reduction if this legislation passes today.

Part of the issue is that the NDP doesn't have a plan when it comes to energy, so they don't understand the whole process. When we're talking about northeastern Ontario, my part of the province, there are over 69,000 families that will be receiving that benefit, and we're very proud of that.

When it comes to Hydro One, we're on track to ensure that we're going to realize the target of \$9 billion generated through the IPO. Let's talk about Greater Sudbury again. We can talk about investment after investment after investment: \$173 million for the four-laning of Highway 69; \$26 million for Maley Drive; \$20 million through OCIF. This is fantastic for the north, and I'm very proud of these—

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

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. We are at warnings. Cupping your hands to make sure a megaphone makes it louder is not conducive to applying what the Speaker is looking for. It also is not helpful, when somebody is giving an answer, that the chipping comes on from the same side that provokes. So it stops on both sides.

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's not just people, Speaker. This is Ontario Small Business Week. Small businesses

across the province cannot afford their hydro bills. Wherever I go, whether it's Sudbury, Kingston, Hamilton, right here in Toronto, Niagara—you name it, Speaker. I talk to small businesses everywhere, and they're all telling me that the cost of hydro is the difference between growing or going out of business.

According to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, one in three—one in three—small businesses say that the cost of hydro has a negative impact on their ability to invest in the future of this province by investing in their businesses. They simply can't do it.

Will this Premier give some hope and confidence to small-business people and start getting hydro costs under control by stopping the sell-off of our hydro system, by stopping the sell-off of Hydro One?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'd like to thank the member for highlighting small businesses and the importance of small businesses, because we recognize that on this side of the House. Let's take a look at a couple of examples about the programs that we are offering and how they support small businesses.

1120

Donaleigh's Irish pub in Barrie took advantage of the Business Refrigeration Initiative offered through Power-Stream. They received more than \$2,500 in one-time incentives and will save \$2,400 annually on energy.

Arbor Memorial, a funeral company, has its head office in Toronto. They used incentives from the Save on Energy program to green their office, upgrading their intensive HVAC system—\$100,000 per year in savings.

Canada Malting Company up in Thunder Bay was one of the very first announcements that I was able to attend. Through the Save on Energy program, they got \$2.5 million back. They're saving \$1 million a year in their energy programs.

We get small business on this side, Mr. Speaker, and we help small businesses.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is for the Premier. A constituent of Huron-Bruce recently called me about his 73-year-old wife, who needs to have orthopedic surgery. She has been waiting since July 2015 for surgery on her knee. That's 15 months and, frankly, that's unacceptable.

My office called the surgeon, and we talked to their staff. We were told that they actually have 300 people on a wait-list, some for as long as two years. Speaker, the surgeon's office explained that the wait times are due to government regulations which dictate that although a surgeon is available, they're only to perform surgeries as funding permits.

Speaker, why should people's quality of life have to be put on hold because of this Premier's wasteful spending and mismanagement? What I would like to know is, what does the Premier have to say to these people?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm the first to admit that there's more work to be done, but we need to recognize exactly where we're situated here in Ontario. We have among the best wait times—we're the first to have measured them, by the way—among the best surgical wait times in the entire country.

In fact, in the last decade we have decreased the wait-time for hip replacement by 42%. We've decreased the wait time for knee replacements by 51%. We've decreased the wait time for cataract surgery by 37%. So there are dramatic improvements. In fact, for hip and knee, more than 80% of individuals achieve those replacements within our targeted amount of time that we aim for—what's called a level-4 target.

But there is more work to be done. I would also expect to be able to work with our hospitals and our clinicians so that those patients who do require those procedures more urgently are able to get access to those surgeries urgently.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from York-Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Back to the Premier. Premier, my constituent Duncan Drummond has been on the emergency wait-list for shoulder surgery for over seven months—an emergency list which, upon investigation, we find is 100 people long. A hundred people are waiting on an emergency list. At this rate, it will be another two years. He is number 101.

His granddaughter describes his condition as a "pseudo-paralysis" on an arm that leaves him in agonizing pain. Mr. Duncan's wife and daughter are here today in the hope that you will understand how important it is for him to be moved along at a faster rate than at this time.

To the Premier: When will you exercise your constitutional obligation to provide health care for my constituents and the rest of the province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I want to acknowledge the Duncan family being here today. This is an important issue and I'm pleased that they are able to see the discussion.

We need to continue to improve, there's no question. But for those individuals that do urgently require procedures, we expect clinicians and hospitals to be able to put them to the top of the list, Mr. Speaker, and we have made significant improvements. We continue to do that.

We continue to invest millions of dollars in bringing down wait times. When you look at knee replacements alone, our average wait time is half of what it is in the OECD. For hip replacements, the OECD—the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development—their average wait time for hip replacements is 121 days. Canada's is 85 days for a hip replacement. Here in Ontario, it is 70 days.

We are at the front of the line, but there, of course, is always more work to be done, in concert with our front-line clinicians and surgeons themselves.

AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Mr. Speaker, in 2013 this government promised to reduce

auto insurance rates by 15%. The rates didn't come down. They campaigned on this promise in 2014, and again—no surprise—the rates didn't come down. In fact, what's going on is, for the second quarter in a row in 2016, rates are actually going up. What makes this even more offensive, Mr. Speaker, is that our benefits have been slashed. This government has allowed the insurance industry to slash benefits.

My question is: Has the government just given up on this promise to reduce auto insurance?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I appreciate the question and the concerns that we all have about reducing auto insurance rates, about ensuring there's fairness in the system and about ensuring that consumers are well protected. Ontario continues to be the most generous in terms of benefits still.

We have reduced rates. They have been going down on average almost 10%, Mr. Speaker, and that's important. It's not at a point in time that matters; it's on an ongoing basis to provide sustainable reductions in costs, in fraud, and in the engagement of certain activities within the sector that have to be improved, and that is being done. It's being done in consultation with the sector. It's being done in consultation with the public. All in all, consumers are demanding greater affordability and they want choice, and Ontario is providing both, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The reality is, over the past two quarters this government has approved rate increases—they've approved them. Another reality is that the government controls rates. They have the ability to control auto insurance rates in this province, and they're simply not doing it. What they are doing, though, is allowing the insurance industry to exploit the people of this province. They have allowed them to slash benefits tremendously. What's so offensive is, it's not just all the people of Ontario; it's even the most seriously injured people who are seeing their protection slashed.

The government claimed that this was a stretch goal; they never really intended to achieve this goal anyway. But that's not what the people voted for. The people want to ensure that the next generation has an affordable life, that they can afford to live in this province. It's not helping when rates continue to increase.

When will the government stop prioritizing insurance company profits over protecting the people of Ontario and finally commit to affordable auto insurance rates in this province?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The fact of the matter is, auto insurance rates on average are going down. That's just simply not true, what the member said. On occasions there are points where rates vary depending upon specific companies. There are over 110 companies that participate in this industry.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, our reforms have been put in place. Programs have enabled us to further reduce rates overall. We are improving the degree of victims who get

responses in a timely manner. That was also a problem, Mr. Speaker. That is being done.

We have been doing a lot of work to try and reform the system to provide better service to consumers and victims, while at the same time provide for greater affordability, and it's being done on a number of reforms that have been enacted and that are continuing to be so. Some of them were delayed, Mr. Speaker, because the members of the opposition—and that party specifically—voted against measures that would have enabled us to act more quickly.

We are doing what's necessary, Mr. Speaker. Auto rates are going down overall.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. This week, provincial and territorial health ministers from across Canada met with federal Health Minister Jane Philpott and indigenous leadership in Toronto to discuss several key aspects of health care. From what I have seen in media reports, much of the discussions were on the future of the federal health transfer. I know that the federal government has a role to play in the sustainable funding of our health care system, not only in Ontario but across Canada.

Would the minister be able to provide us with an update of those very important discussions?

1130

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We had an excellent two days of meetings here in Toronto with my provincial, territorial and then, yesterday, federal health minister colleagues. Although we didn't agree on everything, we did agree that a stable financial base is essential for all of the provinces and territories to be able to continue to provide the high-quality services that we do. I know that Minister Philpott agrees with that as well.

We had an excellent two-hour session with national indigenous leaders and their organizations yesterday morning. It was powerful to hear from them, and the specific recommendations and proposals that they've put forward.

It's important to note—because I think most Ontarians don't understand this—that roughly 80% of the dollars that go towards health care across this country is provided by the provinces and territories, and only about 20% by the federal government. We're hoping to maintain that federal share. We think that's the fair approach to take.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thanks to the minister for that response. I also believe it is important that we have a strong federal partner, finally, in order to sustainably fund health care in Ontario. I look forward to further updates.

Minister, would you be able to inform the House how incoming funds are directed entirely towards improving health care for Ontarians?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Historically, 50 years ago this year, medicare was created in this great country. There

was a commitment to share 50%-50% between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments. That has declined down, as I mentioned, to about 20% being the federal contribution. We want not to maintain that but to bring it back to where it used to be in terms of the historical partnership that did agree.

But I want to reassure Ontarians that every single dollar we get through Canada Health Transfer for health care from the federal government goes to health care. In Ontario, that contribution now from the federal government amounts to about 1.5% of our annual health budget that we get from the federal government. Of course, as many of you know, in many years our budget for health has gone up by 5% or 6%, sometimes even 7%. It certainly has consistently been above 1.5%.

We're looking for a fair relationship. We're looking for an increase to the federal contribution so it respects history.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question as well is to the Minister of Health.

In Ottawa, we have the second-longest wait times in Ontario for MRIs. The government says that 90% of those needing a “non-urgent” MRI should get it within 28 days, but the Champlain LHIN said it could take up to 132 days, not 28. Ottawa Hospital's CEO, Jack Kitts, also told the Ottawa Sun that without more resources, “I don't want to leave you with any misconception that going from 132 (days) to 28 is realistic.”

According to the Ottawa Citizen, the government also won't pay the operating costs for the Ottawa Heart Institute's new MRI.

The government is failing my constituents, and the people in Ottawa-Vanier who will be going to the polls on November 17, with unachievable targets because of unavailable cash. Why is this government setting targets it can't meet because of payments that they won't make to operate these MRIs in Ottawa?

Interjections.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to consult with my colleagues, because I understand that the member opposite was at the Queensway Carleton announcement last Friday with the Premier, where we announced a fantastic new senior-specific clinic, called an ACE clinic, which will make a dramatic impact. I know you were very happy with that investment.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to MRIs—I will definitely address the issue substantially now and in the supplementary—we are making considerable progress. Again, on MRIs and CAT scans and ultrasounds, we're either at the top, in terms of the shortest wait times in Canada, or very near the shortest wait times. We're measuring them and we're making significant progress.

We realize that we need to continue to invest, particularly in these important diagnostic procedures, and we need to make sure that those who need the procedure most urgently get it most urgently.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: My question is to the Premier.

Isaac Kraus of Thornhill has worked in Canada most of his life and he paid his taxes, but now he's 62 years old and diabetic. He had a family doctor for 30 years who suddenly retired, and Isaac said he panicked. He knew what was ahead. He tried to find a new family doctor and he was called in for interviews, as though he was applying for a job, and rejected. He believes that doctors did not want to take him into their practice due to his diabetes.

Does the Premier understand the challenges faced by patients with diabetes and other illnesses in this province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We expect all our primary care providers to welcome individuals into their practice, regardless of what their medical history might be. In fact, it would be unethical to do anything but that. I don't know the specific case.

But with all of the questions coming this way on wait times in terms of access to family doctors—in fact, we have 900 net new practising physicians that work in this province each and every year—I have to ask the question: If wait times are so important, if hospital investments are so important, MRIs are so important, why the heck did that party vote against our budget this spring with a \$345-million investment in health care? It begs the question: If it is so important to them now, why wasn't it important to them then?

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Premier. The Minister of Health just said that the average wait times for hip and knee surgeries is 70 days in Ontario. Well, people in London are waiting nearly four times as long for hip and knee replacements, and the Ministry of Health reports on their website that the provincial wait time is currently 209 days.

My constituent Jean Cassidy has been waiting 300 days for her surgery, and that's not counting the time she spent waiting just to see a surgeon in the first place. If surgeries are cancelled again in London, like they were last year, Jean will be waiting until April to get the surgery she's needed for more than a year. When will the Premier admit there's a wait-time crisis in London and step up to fix it now for people like Jean?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question, and I appreciate the fact that the member opposite has repeatedly brought this forward and brought it to our attention. It's an important issue.

When it comes to the South West LHIN, we are working very closely with the South West LHIN, as we speak, to make sure that access to surgeries, including hip and knee replacement for example, are provided when they're required. Part of that is a triage, as I've repeated, that those who urgently do need that procedure need to

go to the top of the list. That is up to the clinician and the hospital to be able to make those arrangements.

There is also the opportunity through the LHIN to talk to the LHIN—because there are different surgeons that provide this. Some have longer wait-lists than others. Some work longer hours than others. There are different hospitals that have different wait-lists as well. Working with the LHIN and with their primary care provider or their specialist, they can often find ways to dramatically shorten that wait time.

Having said that, I am working closely with the South West LHIN. I'll speak to it more in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, I'd like to hear the Premier's answer to that. No matter where you live in Ontario, you should be able to get the surgery you need without having to wait for months on end. I've spoken to Dr. Rajgopal, an orthopaedic surgeon in Strathroy who is incredibly frustrated by the pain that his patients are forced to live with because of the Liberal government's decisions. Every day, he sees patients who are waiting far longer than they should have to for surgeries that they need.

He has a simple question for the Premier: Why won't this Liberal government properly fund surgeries for patients in London and across southwestern Ontario when our wait-lists are out of control?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: There's nothing more important to me than to work towards providing services and procedures when people need them, in a timely fashion. I work every day to achieve that end.

I am working with the South West LHIN, with the hospitals involved in the London area as well, and I expect in the very near future we will have arrived at a solution that the member opposite, I think, can have confidence is going to address the issue that she has addressed appropriately today.

1140

We have made significant investments. We have seen dramatic—to the order of 50%—declines in wait times over the past decade. We've invested \$2 billion just in wait-time reductions in the last decade, roughly, in this province.

With regard to the South West LHIN, I'm working directly with them. I expect that in the coming days we'll have a solution that the member opposite can have confidence in.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Speaker, as you know, small businesses are an important and core part of the engine of our economy, and they provide many good-paying jobs for people across Ontario.

In my riding of Beaches–East York, we know that we thrive on the success of our small businesses and our entrepreneurs. We have organizations like DECA, the

Danforth East Community Association, that help small businesses and pop-up shops in retail malls to get their businesses started.

As you know, Speaker, for 25 years I worked as a self-employed consultant assisting many small businesses with their growth, and I also co-founded a number of small businesses which continue to employ people to this day, so I understand the challenges faced by small businesses in Ontario.

This week is Small Business Week. We've had some conversations already about how important small business owners are to our economy, and we are celebrating their continuing contributions.

Can the minister advise this Legislature about what our government is doing to help small businesses compete and grow globally?

Hon. Brad Duguid: This is a great week to acknowledge the fact that Ontario is now producing some of the best start-ups and some of the best small businesses that are producing some of the most sought-after innovation anywhere in North America today. That's not happening by accident. That's happening because we've taken a number of measures to help small businesses reduce their costs. For instance, we completely eliminated the capital tax, saving small businesses hundreds of millions of dollars. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, were the opposition onside with us when we did that? Absolutely not.

We've reduced the corporate tax rate for small businesses. That has given them a 13% advantage south of the border. The NDP want us to jack that rate up even further. We're not going to do that because we support our small businesses.

We've brought in the HST—a tough political decision, but that is saving businesses hundreds of millions of dollars. The NDP don't want them to have that savings. They're still not supporting that—

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

Mr. Arthur Potts: I am delighted to hear this minister talk about all the incredible programs that we're putting in place to help small businesses grow and compete globally. It just shows that we in Ontario are focusing on helping businesses stay ahead in the global economy.

In Beaches–East York, I can tell you that many small businesses are saying that the best thing that governments can do is to reduce unnecessary burden. Sometimes governments just have to get out of the way and let those who are creating the jobs do their job. I know the minister has been recognized numerous times nationally for his commitments to reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens. So while we celebrate the progress that we've made, I know what small businesses really want to hear is what else we are planning to do to help Ontario be more competitive and support the creation of small businesses and jobs across Ontario.

Will the minister tell us about the initiatives he is taking to make Ontario a global leader in reducing red tape and the costs associated with operating small businesses?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I know the member has been a very valuable spokesperson for small business for many years, and I thank him for his leadership in that area. He would know that we are absolutely passionate about making Ontario the easiest place in North America, if not the world, in which to invest and operate a small business.

That's why we've completely restructured our government and how we regard regulatory burden. We've established a Regulatory Modernization Committee that starts from the top up. Our Secretary of Cabinet and Ed Clark are sort of the siphon which all good ideas come through to ensure we can move at the pace of business so it doesn't take us five years to initiate a good idea but takes us a matter of weeks, if not months.

Mr. Speaker, we set up a regulatory centre of excellence to root out and eliminate red tape, and we set up our Red Tape Challenge, where we're tackling sector-by-sector challenges that small businesses face.

We're determined to reduce the regulatory burden for small businesses and make Ontario more competitive.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Premier. Constituents tell me they've been stranded on wait-lists for necessary surgeries. In the last year alone, I've heard from 10 people forced to wait in pain for hip and knee replacements, back surgery, thyroid cancer surgery and a stem cell transplant. Andy is one of them. Before he got in touch with my office, he was told it could take two years for hip replacement surgery. Andy said it best: "I just don't get the incompetence of the health system within Ontario, and I hold the Minister of Health totally responsible for this inept process."

Underfunded, unprepared and unsympathetic: Is this the kind of system that the Premier is proud of?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm starting to sound like a broken record here. It still boggles the mind why they would vote against—in fact, of that \$345 million in new money to go towards our hospitals alone, let alone the \$1 billion we added to the health care system, which they didn't support, either element—a significant part of that \$345 million was invested specifically and wholly and entirely in further bringing down wait times for important procedures like hip and knee and back surgery.

That aside, we've made—I would describe it as dramatic progress, where we're the best or among the best in Canada. We're better than many, many jurisdictions around the world. Do we have more work to do? Of course. That's why we're making these investments. It's unfortunate they didn't support them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary? The member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: A constituent from my riding, Joe, had a consultation for hip surgery at Strathroy hospital in September 2015. Last

month—12 months later—he was informed that the earliest he might expect the surgery would be April 2017, but likely much later. This is a minimum 560-day wait.

While residents of Strathroy wait and wait, many who seek care elsewhere in the province are experiencing average waits of fewer than 80 days. Mr. Speaker, residents of Strathroy are concerned about this Liberal government's rationing of care, where one region appears to be getting better health care than another.

Do you agree that wait times for my constituents would be reduced if you funded health care for residents of Strathroy at the same rate that you fund health care elsewhere in Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I have to draw the line, because when they were in power, they didn't even measure wait times. When we came into government and started measuring wait times, we found that their wait times were the worst in Canada. Now they're the best. They are the best.

The Wait Time Alliance's report card on wait times—from the Fraser Institute, which you'll like—notes that Ontario continues to receive straight As for wait times in five key service areas: hip replacement surgery, knee replacement surgery, cataract procedures, cancer radiation, and coronary artery bypass grafts. The Fraser Institute says that we're getting straight As on precisely the issue that they've been raising all morning.

I think it's reprehensible that they voted against a budget that would have made further improvements and they're trying to discredit a process where we've seen dramatic improvement verified by independent third parties.

Interjections.

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

New question.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday's city of Toronto report on child care demand and affordability highlights what families across this province have known for years, and that is: Access to affordable child care in this province has reached a tipping point. Three quarters of Toronto's families can't afford licensed child care, which costs an average of \$22,000 a year. That's unacceptable.

Parents are being forced to delay going back to work because they can't find a child care spot for their child, but far too often it's also because they simply can't afford to pay for those spaces. Child care is beyond the reach of most families these days.

The Premier must do better by the families of this province. When will this government deal with the affordability crisis in our child care sector?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Associate Minister of Education responsible for early years and child care.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I want to thank the member opposite for that very important question. I'm

pleased to talk about our plan. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, we understand that Ontario families are facing challenges when it comes to finding affordable child care in the province. That's why we are making a historic investment, but that's also why affordability has been front and centre in the conversations that we have been having about child care.

1150

Let me just talk a little bit about our commitment. We are committing to create 100,000 new child care spaces for children zero to four years old. That is a historic investment, an investment that also absolutely will include child care subsidies to support families.

This conversation cannot happen without talking about affordability, and so I'm pleased to answer and talk a little bit more about our plans to ensure that affordability is part of our plan to roll out the 100,000 spaces.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the government talks a lot about creating those child care spaces, but the report that was tabled the other day at the city of Toronto shows very clearly that affordability itself is the key issue here. The authors are very clear. They say, "Simply creating spaces isn't enough. Growth requires"—requires—"addressing affordability."

This Premier promised to be better on issues like child care, Speaker, but she's let families down. Families and children in this province deserve access to quality, affordable, licensed child care now. We know that child care is a smart investment that supports the economy and helps families to build a future if they can access it. But the problem is they can't access it.

Will this Premier step up and address the affordability crisis that we have in the child care sector here in Ontario?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, again, for the question. As I mentioned earlier, we have heard from parents and child care professionals about the need for increased access to affordable care, and we have been listening. That's why those conversations are ongoing and that's why we are committing to making affordability part of our plan when we transform the way we are delivering child care in this province.

We are committing to 100,000 new spaces over the next five years, but in addition to that, we are also looking at budgets. We've included an operating budget of \$600 million to \$750 million, which will include subsidies and will include a conversation about where those subsidies are needed.

I look forward to chatting with early childhood care workers, also with parents, and of course, with community leaders out there about where the needs are. But we are providing the city of Toronto \$351 million to assist with child care.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. This week is Local Government

Week in the province of Ontario. Local governments are the level of government that has the greatest impact on our day-to-day lives, Mr. Speaker.

There are thousands of people across the province who work hard to make our communities work better for us: mayors and councillors, school board trustees, firefighters, police officers, paramedics, librarians, planners, by-law and building inspectors, public health nurses and many others. These workers are opening their doors this week so that young people in our province can see how local government works for us.

School boards are also opening up across the province to teach students about local government.

Would the minister provide some detail on some of the efforts surrounding Local Government Week?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke-Lakeshore for the question. I want to thank the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, as well as—as he's mentioned in his question—local government workers, school boards and associations for the work that they're doing to incent, I believe, and to offer a springboard of opportunity for the next generation of elected people in the province of Ontario. They're doing it through a variety of means, as you've heard in the question, Speaker, through tours, through open houses and through contests.

I remember very clearly being elected in 1997 to municipal council in my riding of Thunder Bay-Atikokan. Our clerk at that time, a lady by the name of Elaine Bahlieda, was a tremendous leader in the community of Thunder Bay—incredibly experienced, incredibly sincere and hard-working. I think it's people like Elaine Bahlieda and the work that they are doing this week during Local Government Week that's going to yield and provide benefit to all of us in the province of Ontario in the years ahead. I thank them for their efforts.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for his answer. As he mentioned, the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario is supporting efforts to celebrate Local Government Week. They have materials for students and teachers available online, and these materials do a very good job of outlining how much local government contributes to our day-to-day lives. Local governments plan our communities, look after local roads, manage our waste disposal and provide recreation facilities—pools, gyms, parks, libraries. They implement our government's policies, in many cases. Anytime we're at a park, taking our kids to school, visiting a library or travelling down a street, we're benefiting from the work of our local government.

Could the minister explain how the government of Ontario is supporting municipalities and local government workers with all of the important work they do for us every day?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Thank you again to the member for the question. I just want to start by saying that, as a government, we take our relationship with our municipal

partners very seriously. I think that we have demonstrated how seriously we take that relationship in very, very tangible ways.

When we were first elected in 2003 as government in the province of Ontario, the financial assistance that was flowing to the municipal sector in Ontario was \$1.1 billion. Today in 2016, 13 to 15 years later, total financial assistance through OMPF and our uploads now totals \$3.8 billion to the municipal sector. That's an increase of \$2.7 billion. If you're from Peterborough, like the member from Peterborough, he'd round that up to around \$3 billion.

That represents about 15% on the municipal tax base for the average municipal taxpayer in the province of Ontario that we have provided in assistance through only two of the programs that we are providing to our municipal partners.

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

Interjections.

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

New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is to the Minister of Health. Wait times to receive cataract surgery in Muskoka have tripled. With an aging population, demand for these surgeries is going up year over year. At the same time, this government has chosen to fund fewer surgeries.

Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is doing the best they can. In 2015-16, they've performed 253 cataract procedures over and above the number that was funded by the government. These surgeries were performed at an operating loss to try to meet the demand from local communities.

Surgery before took six to nine months on the waiting list, but now it takes a year to a year and a half. This is unacceptable. Will the minister commit to putting an end to the increasing wait times and help the people of Muskoka and those living in rural Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is a great health care organization. They're doing a fantastic job in providing care to members of their community. In part through the increased funding in the budget this year and to recognize the important work that they're doing and the needs that they have, we increased their budget by over \$500,000 this year alone, which is helping them to continue to provide those important services.

But because cataracts were mentioned, I have to go back to the fact that the Fraser Institute itself gave us a straight A as a province, specifically on our delivery of cataract procedures, when they're looking at wait times. This is the Wait Time Alliance report card. They gave us a straight A in five different areas—I've already referenced the others, but they gave us a straight A in cataracts.

Is there more work to be to be done? Of course. That's what this new money, the \$500,000, is going to help do.

DEFERRED VOTES

ONTARIO REBATE FOR ELECTRICITY CONSUMERS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA REMISE DE L'ONTARIO POUR LES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉLECTRICITÉ

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

Bill 13, An Act in respect of the cost of electricity /
Projet de loi 13, Loi concernant le coût de l'électricité.

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

The division bells rang from 1159 to 1204.

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

On October 18, 2016, Mr. Thibeault moved third reading of Bill 13. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Hardeman, Ernie	Naqvi, Yasir
Anderson, Granville	Hatfield, Percy	Natyshak, Taras
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hillier, Randy	Nicholls, Rick
Arnott, Ted	Hoggarth, Ann	Oraziotti, David
Bailey, Robert	Horwath, Andrea	Pettapiece, Randy
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Potts, Arthur
Barrett, Toby	Hunter, Mitzie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Bradley, James J.	Kiwala, Sophie	Sandals, Liz
Chiarelli, Bob	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sattler, Peggy
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leal, Jeff	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	MacCharles, Tracy	Singh, Jagmeet
Coe, Lorne	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Colle, Mike	Malhi, Harinder	Sousa, Charles
Coteau, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Crack, Grant	Martins, Cristina	Takhar, Harinder S.
Damerla, Dipika	Martow, Gila	Taylor, Monique
Del Duca, Steven	Matthews, Deborah	Thibeault, Glenn
Delaney, Bob	Mauro, Bill	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dhillon, Vic	McDonnell, Jim	Vanthof, John
Dickson, Joe	McGarry, Kathryn	Vernile, Daiene
Duguid, Brad	McMeekin, Ted	Walker, Bill
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Wilson, Jim
Fife, Catherine	Milczyn, Peter Z.	Wong, Soo
Fraser, John	Miller, Norm	Wynne, Kathleen O.
French, Jennifer K.	Miller, Paul	Yakubski, John
Gates, Wayne	Moridi, Reza	Yurek, Jeff
Gélinas, France	Munro, Julia	Zimmer, David
Gravelle, Michael	Murray, Glen R.	
Gretzky, Lisa	Naidoo-Harris, Indira	

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

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 88; the nays are 0.

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

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

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

The House recessed from 1207 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's my profound pleasure today to introduce a colleague of mine from the city of Ottawa, Councillor George Darouze from the Osgoode ward in my constituency of Nepean–Carleton, as well as staff Jane Diraimo and Carley Williamson. I'm really happy that they're here today to talk about hydro.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It is my profound pleasure today to introduce 8,500 signatures on a hydro fairness petition that had been presented to me by my city councillor for Osgoode ward, George Darouze. He has been working very hard on this program. He launched it in March; it ran through to October. We had a hydro meeting with the ombudsman for Hydro One that we co-sponsored with local city councillor Scott Moffatt and Michael Qaqish.

In fact, rural city councillors in the city of Ottawa have helped to contribute to George's petition campaign. I'd like to acknowledge Councillors Moffatt, Blais, El-Chantiry and Monette. Also, many volunteers throughout our constituency worked hard to ensure that the 8,500 signatures were collected—and I'll note, Speaker, that they were all hand-signed; this is not an e-petition, this was a lot of work—including from residents as well as small business, over 20 in the Osgoode ward, but they also came from West Carleton, Cumberland, Manotick and all over the city of Ottawa.

It was pointed out to me earlier today by George that in 2014, Bob Chiarelli, who is a local Ottawa member and also a former mayor of Ottawa and energy minister, once compared our electricity system to Walmart. So, in the view of George Darouze and many people in the city of Ottawa, they want to know this: If Bob Chiarelli can comment about it being Walmart, why can't they price-match? That's a question that George had, and one I'm happy to bring to the floor of the assembly.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Peter Tabuns: There's a town near Sudbury called Gogama and very few people in Ontario know it. In some ways that's good, because if it would be known well, it would be known because it would have gone through what the people of Lac-Mégantic went through. Last year, a train carrying a large load of oil went through that town and, but for a few hundred metres, when it crashed, when it created an incredible fire, it could have burned alive everyone in that village, people who were asleep.

It's been well over a year. There was a clean-up done by CN—I'll say "clean-up" in quotation marks, because, Speaker, there's still dead fish coming to the surface in the river that runs by Gogama. It is still possible to throw a rock in that river and have a spout of oil come up, have an oil sheen come over that river.

Speaker, it's a wonderful thing that the people of that town were not burned alive. It is a wonderful thing. But the people of that town and the surrounding community are now living with oil contamination that is unsupportable and indefensible. CN has to clean up. The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change has to prosecute CN if it does not clean up, and clean up immediately.

We're going into a second winter. The oil is still there. The people of Gogama cannot be forgotten.

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING AND DESIGN TECHNOLOGIES

Mrs. Amrit Mangat: This past Thursday I had the pleasure to attend an announcement with the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science in my great riding of Mississauga–Brampton South. Minister Moridi announced \$763,000 from the Ontario Research Fund for Sheridan College's Centre for Advanced Manufacturing and Design Technologies.

Sheridan is an excellent place to learn the knowledge and skills that young people need to succeed in the knowledge-based economy, and the college is a key part of our community's accelerated economic growth and long-term prosperity. Sheridan College has built invaluable relationships with businesses in my region. Working together, they provide students with the new skills, training and opportunities needed to succeed. Minister Moridi and I saw how Sheridan's 3D printing technology can produce durable and complex parts essential to the medical and aerospace industries which are important to my riding and Ontario. Thank you, Mr. Moridi, for the investment in Sheridan College and its students.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank Dr. Farzad Rayegani for his tour of Sheridan's Centre for Advanced Manufacturing and Design Technologies.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to remind everybody that today is October 19, and that means Child Abuse Prevention Month—the month of October and specifically today. We're saying, "Go, Jays, Go" but we're also saying "Go Purple." Wear purple today and the CN Tower is going to be lit up purple as well. And hopefully we're going to be celebrating a Jays' win today.

I want to remind people that it's our duty, it's everybody in the community's job, to keep children safe and to report any possible abuse or neglect of children in the community. We have fantastic children's aid societies here in Ontario. In fact, Theresa Micallef, the communications specialist from the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, specifically sent me the hashtag that people should post on Twitter today: #GoPurple.

I just want to remind everybody that the children's aid societies are there to keep children safe; 97% of children that are investigated do stay with their families. Let's look up @October_is_CAPM, do the hashtag #GoPurple and for more information go to oacas.org. #GoPurple.

AUTISM TREATMENT

Miss Monique Taylor: Yesterday I had the pleasure of visiting Yes I Can Nursery School in Toronto, an organization that provides autism supports and child care. This organization provides services to 110 children from all over Toronto. Some children depend so much on these services that they travel hours to get there. They place great value on those services, and apparently they are not alone—or at least they weren't. The Premier herself has visited them many times in support of the excellent model of child services.

Now she is not there for them when they need her. Instead, Kathleen Wynne's government is cutting their funding. The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth has said that when you enter this nursery, "you can just feel the possibility." If Yes I Can does not receive this funding, these families will lose this possibility.

The government claims to be committed to improving services for children with autism, but here they are, refusing to fund an organization that provides needed services. Why is the Premier letting things get worse for children with autism? Speaker, today is the 26th birthday of Yes I Can. I call on the Premier to celebrate the milestone by stabilizing the funding for Yes I Can. Will she do the right thing and put these families' minds at ease, or will she just be blowing out their candles?

SANCTUARY REFUGEE HEALTH CENTRE

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Mr. Speaker, during our recent constituency week, I had the opportunity to visit a health care facility in my riding of Kitchener Centre called the Sanctuary Refugee clinic. I'd like to tell you and members of the House a little bit about it. It's situated in an older home on King Street. That's the main street in Kitchener. Currently, they have a patient roster of about 1,500 people. They offer very comprehensive care. They're like an urgent care clinic but their special focus is seeing and treating newcomers.

As I have shared previously in the Legislature, Waterloo region has welcomed over 1,200 Syrian newcomers to our community in the past year and the Sanctuary Refugee clinic has already seen 500 of these individuals come through their doors with various health care and mental health issues.

Speaker, it was very impressive to see first-hand the hard-working, selfless staff and volunteers who are led by Dr. Michael Stephenson provide health care with dignity to vulnerable refugees in Waterloo region. I want to commend them for the important work that they are performing every day at the Sanctuary Refugee clinic as

they patiently help people who are the newest members of our community.

I want to add that I'm very proud of the commitment that our government has made to welcoming Syrian newcomers to our province, helping them to settle in, helping them to find homes and get enrolled into schools and seeking out health support where needed. As the daughter of immigrants, when I look at the children of these newcomers, I see great possibilities for the future.

1510

ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

Mr. Todd Smith: I'm getting to my feet today to tell you about Graham Walt. Graham is one of hundreds of farmers in my riding that got hammered this summer by the drought. When he spoke to my office today, he talked about how the corn harvest this year was just enough to feed the cows for this winter, and even then, he had to get additional hay from Warkworth and from York region.

But Graham's problem extends well beyond the drought. MPAC assessments in my riding have more than doubled for class 1 agricultural land. An MPAC representative told Quinte West council last night that the supply of farmland since the last assessment had caused the price per acre to more than double. In Graham's case, it went up 125% at the property on Lakeside Drive in Ameliasburgh, in Prince Edward county.

Back in September, the Minister of Agriculture showed up in Prince Edward county to assess the state of the drought and said he knew that my local farmers were feeling the brunt of the drought. But matters have only gotten worse, and the questions my constituents had that day about the crop insurance program have still gone unanswered.

For many farmers, the drought was bad enough to knock them down, but a lot of them thought they could make it through the winter to next spring. But the latest news on assessments for class 1 agricultural land might just be enough to knock them out. You can't increase assessment costs by 125%, have a drought all summer, and expect the farmers to feed our cities.

Once again, this government has taken a land problem in the GTA and let it dictate policy across the province. I know the minister told the Peterborough Examiner that it was hard to get some members of the government to care about what happens in rural Ontario, but I'll guarantee that those members don't want to pay \$10 for a quart of milk from eastern Ontario. My farmers, like Graham Walt, need more than just talk from this government.

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. John Vanthof: This week we celebrate Small Business Week. We all have a tremendous amount of respect for small businesses. They lay everything on the line, with no safety net, because they want to prosper and they want to serve their community.

Today, I would like to focus on one small business in my riding, in Earlton, Ontario: Earlton Grocery King.

The Earlton grocery store was going to close, and in 2009, Michel Maurice took up the torch and re-opened as Earlton Grocery King to serve the people. Can you imagine a town with 1,500 people in the area with no grocery store? Michel—Mike—stepped up to the plate.

When Mike started and took over his business, his hydro bill was \$3,500 a month, because, as you know, grocery stores have a lot of freezers and coolers and lights. Mike was prepared. He saw that number and he was prepared to live with that number. He called me a couple of months ago, and his hydro bill was \$6,800 a month. He called me a few days ago, and his last hydro bill was \$7,500 for 35 days. Mike is almost down for the count.

The Premier says she wants to create jobs in rural Ontario, but why have they gotten to the point where they're actually killing small business throughout the province?

DICK WATTS

Mrs. Cristina Martins: I rise today to pay tribute to the late Dick Watts, a man who contributed so much to Regal Heights, a fantastic community in my riding of Davenport.

Dick Watts was an inspiration to the residents of Regal Heights. He was the true soul of the Regal Heights community and, for over three decades, the real soul of the residents' association as well. His vision and work have made the neighbourhood the vibrant community that it is today.

As the local member of provincial Parliament, I was fortunate to have met Dick Watts on a number of occasions at the many events organized in the Regal Heights area. His involvement within the Davenport community and in community development has been an inspiration both to me and to our community.

Everywhere you look in Regal Heights, you see his influence, whether it is in the friendship and co-operation between residents, or the garden in the park which he helped build. Over the years, he planted trees, removed graffiti, organized community carolling and Canada Day processions, annual community clean-ups and art installations, and planted bulbs on what is known today as Daffodil Hill at Davenport Road and Dufferin. Dick also promoted the history and heritage of the area by supporting the restoration of the portico at Regal Heights public school and hosting annual heritage walking tours.

His constant initiatives on behalf of the community were extensive, and he did them all for the benefit of everyone. It was his true dedication to his community that made Dick Watts special.

Sadly, Dick passed away at the age of 93 on October 12, 2015. Last week, I attended a ceremony with the local community, Dick's wife, family, and friends to commemorate a recently renovated staircase at Regal Road and Glenholme Avenue that descends onto Davenport Road.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: This location was a very special place to Dick, so it was fitting that these steps were renamed the Dick Watts Steps. I know that now, whenever the community assembles for an event, they will use the Dick Watts Steps and reflect on his continued legacy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements. As a gentle reminder, there is a clock that we should be making our statements to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ELECTION STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ÉLECTIONS

Mr. Naqvi moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 45, An Act to amend certain Acts with respect to provincial elections / Projet de loi 45, Loi visant à modifier certaines lois en ce qui concerne les élections provinciales.

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.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The purpose of this bill is to implement proposed reforms that will transform Ontario's election system. Among other reforms, this legislation will move the scheduled election date to the first Thursday in June, engage 16- and 17-year-olds by allowing them to sign up on a provincial registry, permit the Chief Electoral Officer to implement his technology-enabled staffing model, and create a Far North electoral boundaries commission to review Ontario's two northernmost ridings.

The changes we are proposing will modernize the election process and increase voter engagement.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH MOIS DE L'HISTOIRE DES FEMMES

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm very pleased to rise today to remind everyone that October is Women's History Month in Ontario, a month that highlights the role women have played in building our province's rich history, un mois qui souligne le rôle que les femmes ont joué dans l'édification de la riche histoire de notre province.

The Canadian theme this year is "Because of Her." It aims to retell stories of women who have shaped

Canadian history and overcome multiple barriers. By retelling their stories we are celebrating their victories, acknowledging their struggles and inspiring the next generation to carry on the important work that still needs to be done, Speaker, to achieve gender equality.

My #BecauseOfHer story, and my siblings', pay tribute to Sandra MacCharles. Because of her, my siblings and I had a wonderful stepmother, our children had a beloved grandmother, and our father a cherished partner for over 30 years. Sadly, she was taken from us quickly and unexpectedly last year by a brain tumour.

Sandra MacCharles both struggled and inspired. She worked hard, had a long career at General Motors Canada and was a rock for both my dad and myself, especially when I experienced cancer for a second time in my own life.

She was a great supporter of my political life, Speaker, even though I can't say we always agreed on our politics, but that was fine. She staffed the front desk of my first campaign office.

I want to encourage each of my colleagues here in this House to join the #BecauseOfHer social media campaign and share your own stories of extraordinary women who have helped shape your lives.

The United Nations International Day of the Girl Child was celebrated last week on October 11.

Durant ce mois, nous lançons notre Programme de reconnaissance des femmes et des jeunes filles chefs de file en développement communautaire annuel.

This month, we are launching our annual Leading Women, Leading Girls, Building Communities Recognition Program. It's in its 11th year and has recognized the leadership of nearly 1,000 women and girls and the contributions they've made to their communities across the province.

Last year we received a record of 192 nominations from MPPs. Nominations are now open as of today for 2017, and I look forward to an even greater number this year. I encourage every member of this House to nominate deserving individuals in their riding.

1520

Another occasion that we celebrated this month, of course, was Persons Day, which falls on October 18 every year. In the 1920s, the Famous Five fought for all women in this country to be declared persons. In 1929, they won their case. The British Privy Council declared that women were persons under the law and eligible to sit in the Canadian Senate.

Since 1929 and since Agnes Macphail became Ontario's first female MPP in 1943, we certainly have come a long way towards gender equality. Two years ago, Kathleen Wynne became the first elected female Premier of this province, and next year, in 2017, we'll be celebrating 100 years of women's voting rights in Ontario.

Applause.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Yay!

The women of our past accomplished so much in the face of inequality. Women today are just as accomplished

and are striving to be treated as equals. It will require both vision and action to achieve that. As the minister responsible for women's issues, I know there's always more work to be done. Along with leaders and experts across the province, our government is doing just that.

En tant que ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine, je sais qu'il y a toujours plus à faire et qu'avec des leaders et des experts à travers la province, notre gouvernement s'est mis à la tâche.

This past year, the government has made tangible progress in promoting gender equality and opportunities for all Ontarians. In February, we launched Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women, which outlines actions to prevent violence against indigenous women and reduce its impact on youth, families, and communities.

Human trafficking is also a devastating crime and human rights violation. Ontario's Strategy to End Human Trafficking was released in June this year and seeks to prevent human trafficking by raising awareness, holding traffickers accountable and, most importantly, ensuring survivors have the supports they need to heal.

We continue to implement It's Never Okay, our action plan to stop sexual violence and harassment. This plan aims to change attitudes and behaviours, improve supports for survivors who come forward and make workplaces and campuses safer and more responsive to complaints about these crimes.

The Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act was passed in March and will make workplaces, campuses and communities safer and provide more support for survivors of sexual violence.

Our #WhoWillYouHelp and #ItsNeverOkay public awareness campaigns have been viewed over 85 million and 56 million times, respectively.

Ce gouvernement travaille aussi à améliorer la sécurité économique des femmes, à promouvoir le leadership des femmes et à autonomiser les femmes à travers l'Ontario.

This government is also working on improving women's economic security, promoting women's leadership and empowering women across Ontario. We have announced gender diversity targets to ensure more women have the opportunity to reach top leadership positions across the province. We are encouraging businesses to set targets of 30% women on their boards by end of 2017.

We are leading by example. The Premier began by appointing a cabinet that is 40% women. We have also set targets to appoint at least 40% of women to all public sector boards and agencies by the end of 2019.

We are also taking action to close the gender wage gap and ensure that women are paid fairly for the work they do. According to a 2016 report, the gender wage gap amounts to more than \$18 billion in forgone income per year in Ontario. A number of complex factors contribute to the wage gap in our province, and I'm working closely with the Minister of Labour to develop Ontario's Gender Wage Gap Strategy.

I'm very proud to recognize Ontario's strong record of encouraging and supporting women and girls in the

workforce and in their communities. We're working to increase opportunity for women across the province and to make them safer.

Notre gouvernement est attaché à poursuivre notre travail dans le but de réaliser l'égalité entre les sexes en Ontario.

Our government is committed to continuing our work towards achieving gender equality in Ontario. Thank you, Speaker. Merci. Meegwetch.

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

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I rise in the House today to recognize Ontario's first Access to Justice Week.

Speaker, it's my great honour, first of all, to introduce some special guests who are visiting for this occasion. I want to welcome Sheena Weir, who's the director of public affairs at the Law Society of Upper Canada; a friend of all, John Callaghan, who is a bencher at the Law Society of Upper Canada; Sabreena Delhon, manager of The Action Group on Access to Justice, or TAG—welcome; and Aaron Denhartog, who is an adviser of public affairs at the Law Society of Upper Canada. I welcome all our friends today.

As the Attorney General, the issue of access to justice is incredibly important to me, and it should be to all members. In all of its forms, access to justice is the most central and relevant challenge facing the broader legal community today. We must always be working to ensure that all people enjoy the same advantages in our justice system, regardless of financial means, geography, ethnicity, sexuality or gender identity or expression.

The Action Group on Access to Justice's recent report, entitled *Public Perceptions of Access to Justice in Ontario*, which was conducted by Abacus Data, makes this very clear: 78% of the people who participated in the study said they felt Ontario's justice system was old-fashioned. About 70% of people said it was intimidating and confusing. Four in 10 people said they do not believe they have equal and fair access to the justice system.

Speaker, it is clear that the status quo is not working. The reality is that our justice system and our services are not always modern and accessible, which people expect and deserve. We need to shake things up.

I'm excited by this challenge because I believe that we have an amazing opportunity to use technology in a way to make our justice system work better for all people. Used in the right way, technology and digital innovation can make information, ideas and services more accessible. It can open doors that are usually closed or are only open to an elite few. It's about ensuring, wherever possible, that justice services are accessible and user-friendly for the public and members of the legal community. That is why a key part of the solution is modernizing old-school justice processes and the way we deliver our services.

Having grown up in the Internet generation, I'm inspired and excited about the opportunities that are

available to us now. One can already do day-to-day banking on our smartphones. You can buy groceries online without ever setting foot in a store. You can even get a master's degree online today. It is time we provided the same convenience for justice services.

I'm here today to tell you that we are on our way. This means examining processes and procedures that are largely paper-based and currently delivered in person, and taking a hard look at court and tribunal operations that, frankly, were designed in another era for another era.

A big focus of my mandate as the Attorney General is on using digital innovation to provide more accessible, responsive and easy-to-use justice services for Ontarians. Although it will take time, my ministry has started laying the groundwork for the next generation of justice services.

I would argue that to be successful at increasing access to justice through digital innovation and technology, it is essential for government to engage with organizations, innovators and the private sector. That is why my ministry is supporting Ryerson University's Access to Justice Challenge, led by the Legal Innovation Zone, a co-working space and incubator for people whose ideas will help change the status quo of Canada's legal system.

The Legal Innovation Zone helps support, foster, and develop solutions and technologies that aim to improve the justice system and legal services. In July, six start-ups were chosen to work in the Ryerson incubator for four months. During this time, they will have access to mentors, advisers and other resources that can help them grow their companies.

In early December, three of these start-ups will be chosen to receive seed funding to get their projects off the ground. This is exactly the kind of thing we should be trying to foster in the justice system: new ways of thinking and new ways of working together, tapping new sources of energy and expertise.

My ministry has taken some first steps to introduce digital innovation in the core system. Last year, in partnership with the courts, we made it possible for people to submit all small claims online. Since then, almost 50% of all claims are now being filed online. In many cases, people filing claims are even able to obtain a judgment online, meaning that they never have to set foot in a courthouse.

1530

Earlier this spring, we rolled out an online service for setting up and updating straightforward child support payments; 100 applications have been received through the new service to date. This means that instead of filling out lengthy court forms and spending hours in court lines and hearings, parents can focus on what matters most: their children.

Moving these straightforward claims and cases out of court also frees up valuable court time that can be used to deal with more urgent and complex cases.

We're also working to increase remote video capacity in our bail courts and our correctional institutions. In 2014, we launched a new service in partnership with the

judiciary to make daily court lists available online as well. Now, over one million visitors a year go to ontariocourtdates.ca to find out where and when they need to go to court instead of having to go into a courthouse.

The Ministry of the Attorney General is also working with the Safety, Licensing Appeals and Standards Tribunals Ontario to modernize the Automobile Accident Benefits Service launched this past April. This independent dispute resolution system helps people who have been injured in a motor vehicle accident and have had their claim denied by an insurance company appeal that decision. Work is now under way to develop an e-filing tool for this service, reducing the amount of paperwork that needs to be filled out and speeding up response times to claims. This will help people move forward with their lives sooner.

These are gradual steps, Speaker, but it's just the beginning. Over the next two years more online services will be available, aimed at making it easier for even more people who use our justice system to complete transactions without having to visit a courthouse or handle a lot of paperwork. Work is already under way to expand online filing to civil claims in the Superior Court of Justice. Documents filed for civil claims make up about one third of all documents filed in our courts today. You can imagine, Speaker, that's a lot of paper. Following the success of our e-filing tool for Small Claims Court, we expect that people filing civil claims will experience quicker turnaround times for court documents, a faster and more efficient way to file forms and pay fees, and fewer trips to the courthouse.

On the family law side, based on the latest census information, four in 10 first marriages end in divorce in Canada. While that is extremely unfortunate, we don't want to add to people's stress at such a difficult time by making the process of getting a divorce cumbersome, time-consuming and hard to understand. That is why I have asked my ministry to look at whether we can make this process easier and less expensive by making the filing process for divorce available online as well.

Nearly 30,000 divorce claims are filed with the court each year. Many of these cases are fairly straightforward and shouldn't require a court hearing. Just to be clear, Speaker, we're in the very early stages of this project, but it is something that we have identified as a priority within the ministry.

We also want to modernize our jury processes. Each year, over 500,000 people across the province are engaged in processes related to jury duty. We recognize the valuable public duty that jurors perform and we appreciate their dedication and the time they spend away from their regular lives, so we want to ensure that the overall experience is fast, simple and as convenient as possible.

Some of the things we are considering include completing the eligibility questionnaire online instead of by mail and making it easier for jurors and prospective jurors to find out when and where they have to attend court. To do this, we are now gathering information

about what services and expertise are available in the marketplace. Our next step will be to assess what we have learned and to determine how to move forward.

Speaker, while that is by no means the extent of the work we are doing, you can see how the use of new technology is at the forefront of our thinking. I'm truly excited about all of these future opportunities and I believe that each one of them will work to make our justice system and our justice services more accessible for all.

I want to thank all the justice sector partners who engaged in many activities this week in Access to Justice Week. We look forward to working together to make sure that our justice system is accessible to all Ontarians.

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

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Laurie Scott: October is Women's History Month, and I am pleased to have this opportunity to recognize the leadership, contributions and accomplishments of women past and present who have made a difference.

This year's theme for Women's History Month is "Because of Her," which looks to highlight women who have shaped Canada's history as political leaders, entrepreneurs, artists and academics, just to name a few. As Canadians and Ontarians, we need to celebrate the successes of the women who came before us, and realize how important they were, given the challenges they had to overcome. It's especially important to tell these stories because they can serve to inspire future generations of women to keep building on the achievements of these pioneers and to make their own mark in society.

Just yesterday, we marked the 87th anniversary of the decision in the Persons Case, which paved the way for women to become fully involved in the civic life of our country. The Famous Five, as they are known, were women ahead of their time. They challenged the idea that women were not legal persons, and they won.

Next year, we will mark 100 years since women of Ontario were granted the right to vote.

In the wake of these historic changes, we have seen many women enter the world of politics and make a real difference. We've seen a political trailblazer like Ellen Fairclough from Hamilton, who became Canada's first female federal cabinet minister. Later, Margaret Birch became the province of Ontario's first female cabinet minister. We also witnessed the appointment of the Right Honourable Kim Campbell as Canada's first female Prime Minister. All three just happened to be Conservative, by the way, Mr. Speaker.

As it stands, we can of course celebrate that 35% of the seats in this Ontario Legislature are currently represented by women, but we must continue to do our part to see that that number does improve.

This also applies to other sectors of our society. For example, we have seen women entrepreneurs and execu-

tives make their mark in the business world, although there is still a long way to go. Today, only about 9% of corporate CEOs are women, but when you consider that just 10 years ago it was half that number, at 4.5%, we can see that women are breaking through barriers in the business world.

In closing, as we mark Persons Day and celebrate Women's History Month, we congratulate and thank the women who opened the doors for those who were to follow, and celebrate them as role models for women and girls across this province and this country.

We recognize that "Because of Her," our province, and our country, is the extraordinary place it is today.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's a pleasure today for me to rise and speak to the inaugural Access to Justice Week here in Ontario by the justice action group with the Law Society of Upper Canada.

Access to justice means many things to many people. It can mean removing financial barriers to legal counsel and our courts, ensuring timely replacements of vacancies on the bench, and reducing the ever-increasing appearances and wait times before matters are dealt with.

I listened to the minister, and I thought I would give some human examples of access to justice that I have met with in my time as an MPP and that illustrate the need for access to justice and the focus of it.

One is Kevin Lanthier, who took 20 years to find justice in our system. His mother, Barbara, was murdered. The convicted murderer used the matrimonial home for legal aid purposes. It had liens of more than twice the value of the home placed on it, and it took over 20 years for the children of Barbara to get those liens extinguished by Legal Aid Ontario.

I do want to thank the previous Minister of the Attorney General, Madeleine Meilleur, for her assistance and help in remedying that awful situation.

There was another one just recently, with Collin Fitzgerald, a decorated Afghan war vet who spent 20 months in our court system, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to defend himself, and eventually all the charges were dropped. It was a terrible odyssey for Collin.

There are many, many more, but I don't have time to speak to them all, Speaker.

I do want to recognize and applaud the Law Society of Upper Canada for this initiative and their recognition that access to justice is indeed a significant priority that we must all put our shoulders to and improve in this province.

1540

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm also honoured to join in the debate or the statements in response to the inaugural Access to Justice Week. I also want to welcome some of the guests here: Sheena Weir, John Callaghan, Sabreena

Delhon and Aaron Denhartog for being here. It means a lot.

I think it's tremendously important that we're acknowledging this week. I also want to acknowledge the fine work in general of the Law Society of Upper Canada and the Law Foundation of Ontario for putting together the Action Group on Access to Justice and the amazing series of events that are going on right now, until the end of the week.

Access to justice is a tremendously important component of our society. I want to borrow from one of the leading legal minds of our country, Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, who says, "There is no justice without access to justice." Those are powerful words and absolutely accurate.

Access to justice has many forms. One of the important areas that we need to talk about when we talk about access to justice is income barriers. One of the key barriers is that income thresholds are set far too low, so people who are earning just enough to barely get by cannot afford legal representation.

Geography is a major access issue in certain communities, being able to access legal advice. That's why it's so important to commit to community-based clinics to ensure that people have access.

Language is a serious barrier to ensuring that people from various walks of life who speak different languages have access in the language of their choice.

There are also certain perceptions and a lack of education or awareness around one's rights when it comes to accessing justice. There needs to be a campaign around that.

Another really troubling area where we see some serious problems with access to justice are the serious delays in the court system. Again, another very powerful line is, "Justice delayed is justice denied." We need to do far more to ensure that people have that access to justice.

I think this is a tremendous step forward, to have a week where we can address these issues, but I think the reality must be named and must be pointed out: Access to justice in our society is not where it needs to be. Justice McLachlin, again, was asked the question, "Do we have adequate access to justice?" She responded, "It seems to me that the answer is no," that we don't right now. That's a terrible thing. If we want to build a society that is based on the rule of law, that is based on justice, we need to ensure we have better access to that.

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure for me to respond on Women's History Month and Persons Day on behalf of my colleague the member from London West, who is in committee for her piece of legislation for protecting interns; ironically, many of whom are women and many of whom need protection in the province of Ontario.

I've had the pleasure in the last 24 hours to attend the Equal Voice event last night, hosted in Toronto, where we honoured the three women who ran the national

campaigns in this country, Katie Telford, Jenni Byrne and Anne McGrath, who all ran those federal campaigns. It was a nonpartisan event, and we acknowledged that this was the first time in the history of this country where women played a national role in organizing those elections. Farah Mohamed was the keynote speaker and she talked about creating opportunities and supporting women on boards, in their communities and through education to ensure that they reach their potential—so very inspirational.

Then, of course, this morning, I also joined the minister at the LEAF national breakfast where we heard the legal battles that are happening in this country, which, quite honestly, was a huge eye-opener for me. It doesn't seem to get any better, quite honestly, when you realize the role that the LEAF National had to play in the Alberta case where the judge, Judge Camp, asked a young 19-year-old aboriginal woman who was homeless at the time and who had been sexually assaulted why she did not keep her knees closed. This happens. These are words and language used in our courts. Obviously, there's a huge challenge, as it should be. This is the kind of discrimination and misogyny that still happens in this province, in this country and in places where there should be justice.

This morning, of course, Margaret Atwood was the keynote speaker. She referenced how bad it could get. One only has to look to the United States. She—we're not referencing the big guy in that presidential heap. We're now calling him "He who shall not be named." We don't want to give him any power because it's already gone to his head. We've also never had a presidential candidate encourage the assassination of another candidate in a national election like that.

So while we can celebrate the progress that we have made, we have to remember we hold on to gender equality very tenuously. We must celebrate it, but we must almost also continue to fight for it each and every day.

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

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to recognize the government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to revert back to motions.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to revert back to motions. Do we agree? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following changes be made to the ballot list: Mr. Baker and Mr. Sergio exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Baker assumes ballot item number 21 and Mr. Sergio assumes ballot item number 31; and Mr. Dickson, Ms. Wong and Mr. Takhar exchange places in the order of precedence such that Mr. Dickson assumes ballot item 17, Ms. Wong assumes ballot item 28 and Mr. Takhar assumes ballot item 39.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that notwithstanding standing order 98(b), the following—

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Dispense.

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

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

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

Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 10, 17, 21, 28, 31 and 39 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 10, 17, 21, 28, 31 and 39 be waived. Do we agree? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Robert Bailey: This petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there is a growing energy affordability crisis in Ontario; and

"Whereas the government's proposed hydro rebate is a band-aid solution that's simply too little, too late;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the Liberal government to take immediate action to give the people of Ontario real relief from high energy bills."

I agree with this petition and will send it down with Olivier to the table.

POST-SECONDARY SECTOR EMPLOYEES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My petition is entitled Supporting Fair Pay and Fair Wages in the Post-Secondary Sector.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government is obligated to spend public funds in a manner which delivers quality services and supports the sustainability of the province; and

“Whereas post-secondary institutions in Ontario receive over \$5 billion in public funds, and act as a critical pillar of Ontario’s economy; and

“Whereas post-secondary institutions rely on the livability of the local communities as a contributing factor in attracting both student applications and qualified staff, as well as maintaining their global competitiveness; and

“Whereas studies show that living wages improve productivity, significantly reduce training costs, reduce worker absenteeism, provide for healthier communities with broader economic growth, and significantly increase the livability of a community; and

“Whereas there is an emerging trend in post-secondary institutions to substitute good-paying jobs with contracted-out services which rarely offer any benefits or pensions and do not provide fair pay and hours of work;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to end the practice of contracting out front-line jobs, and provide fair, stable hours of work as well as equitable remuneration.”

It is my pleasure to affix my signature to this petition and I will give it to this page. Thank you for your undivided attention.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It’s my pleasure to introduce to this assembly 8,500 signatures collected by my city councillor, George Darouze.

“We, the undersigned, residents of Ottawa, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide harmonized billing rates to Ottawa’s 45,000 Hydro One customers as Hydro Ottawa customers.”

The best part, Speaker, is that not only will I affix my signature to this, but it will be page Dylan from our constituency who will be taking this to the table. Thank you very much, Dylan, and thank you very much, Councillor Darouze.

1550

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Privatizing Hydro One: Another Wrong Choice.

“Whereas once you privatize hydro, there’s no return; and

“We’ll lose billions in reliable annual revenues for schools and hospitals; and

“We’ll lose our biggest economic asset and control over our energy future; and

“We’ll pay higher and higher hydro bills just like what’s happened elsewhere;

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

“To stop the sale of Hydro One and make sure Ontario families benefit from owning Hydro One now and for generations to come.”

Mr. Speaker, of course I wholeheartedly support this petition. I will affix my name to it and send it with page Surya.

GREEN POWER GENERATION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Thornhill, because she’s bopped up and down five times.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario—I’m trying to get my exercise. We sit too much around here.

“Whereas Ontario already overpays for wind and solar energy supplied under the FIT and microFIT programs compared to other provinces, including Quebec; and

“Whereas many townships have declared themselves unwilling hosts for industrial wind turbine developments;

“Whereas the IESO has ignored municipalities’ wishes and approved projects in unwilling host municipalities;

“Whereas the Auditor General identified that the global adjustment—the cost of overpaying for electricity under the Green Energy Act—has cost Ontarians \$37 billion to date and will cost us another \$133 billion by 2032;

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

“To immediately impose a complete moratorium on all wind and solar project developments in unwilling host communities.”

I affix my signature and I give it to page Riya.

LOGEMENTS POUR PERSONNES ÂGÉES

M. John Vanthof: I have a petition here signed by over 1,200 people.

« À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Attendu que les personnes âgées habitant au deuxième étage de la Villa Aubin située au 145 rue Holditch ... doivent utiliser l’escalier afin d’accéder à leur appartement;

« Attendu que ces personnes âgées sont confrontées à des difficultés croissantes en ce qui a trait à l’usage de ces escaliers;

« Attendu que cet accès restreint pourrait entraîner des conséquences néfastes relatives aux soins de santé, telles que l’accès avec des brancards;

« Attendu que divers paliers gouvernementaux ont annoncé du financement pour des fins de

rénovations/améliorations aux logements pour personnes âgées;

« Par conséquent, nous, les soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario comme suit :

« De charger le ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement à travailler avec la Société de logement du district de Nipissing afin d'obtenir du financement pour l'installation d'un ascenseur dans ce, et autres bâtiments d'accès restreint pour personnes âgées. »

I fully agree and submit with page Dylan.

HYDRO RATES

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

“Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the Liberal government took office; and

“Whereas over half of Ontarians’ power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

“Whereas many rural customers will see delivery charges soaring by as much as 25% in 2017, which will increase their total hydro bills by up to 11.5%; and

“Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced into energy poverty, having to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

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

“To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

It's signed by people all across Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock. I'll hand this to page Catherine.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Todd Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn’s, Alzheimer’s, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but the scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe;

“Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario;

“Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process for establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize

testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to direct the Ontario public health system and OHIP to include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme disease in Ontario and to have everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

I agree with this, will sign it and send it to the table with page Riya.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “Nurses Know—Petition for Better Care.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas providing high-quality, universal, public health care is crucial for a fair and thriving Ontario; and

“Whereas years of underfunding have resulted in cuts to registered nurses (RNs) and hurt patient care; and

“Whereas, in 2015 alone, Ontario lost more than 1.5 million hours of RN care due to cuts; and

“Whereas procedures are being off-loaded into private clinics not subject to hospital legislation; and

“Whereas funded services are being cut from hospitals and are not being provided in the community; and

“Whereas cutting skilled care means patients suffer more complications, readmissions and death;

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

“Implement a moratorium on RN cuts;

“Commit to restoring hospital base operating funding to at least cover the costs of inflation and population growth;

“Create a fully-funded multi-year health human resources plan to bring Ontario’s ratio of registered nurses to population up to the national average;

“Ensure hospitals have enough resources to continue providing safe, quality and integrated care for clinical procedures and stop plans for moving such procedures into private, unaccountable clinics.”

I sign this petition and give it to page Suryakant to deliver to the table.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: These petitions keep coming in.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas electricity rates have risen by more than 300% since the current Liberal government took office; and

“Whereas over half of Ontarians’ power bills are regulatory and delivery charges and the global adjustment; and

“Whereas the global adjustment is a tangible measure of how much Ontario must overpay for unneeded wind and solar power, and the cost of offloading excess power to our neighbours at a loss; and

“Whereas the energy policies of this Liberal government ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board and the Independent Electricity System Operator, and resulted in Ontarians’ electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province; and

“Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and deny Ontarians the option to choose affordable natural gas heating; and

“Whereas more and more Ontarians are being forced to cut down on essential expenses such as food and medicines in order to pay their increasingly unaffordable electricity bills;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity paid for by Ontarians, including costs associated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

Thank you very much for providing me the opportunity to present this petition. I’ll affix my signature as I agree with it wholeheartedly.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Rick Nicholls: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ontario government is proposing changes to regulation 440, by way of the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission (OFPMC), to replace the regulated marketing of 14 processing vegetable commodities in favour of a free-market system; and

“Whereas this removal of the negotiating authority of the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers (OPVG) is a removal of the *raison d’être* of the OPVG in favour of an industry advisory committee; and

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

“That the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and the government of Ontario support the Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers’ right to negotiate price terms and conditions of contracts for processing vegetables in Ontario on producers’ behalf.”

I support this petition. I will give it to Elisabeth.

1600

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Laurie Scott: “Stop the Sale of Hydro One.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the decision to sell Hydro One has been made without public input and the sale will be conducted in complete secrecy; and

“Whereas if the people of Ontario lose majority ownership in Hydro One, ratepayers will be forced to accept whatever changes the new owners decide, including higher rates; and

“Whereas Ontario’s Financial Accountability Officer has warned the sale of Hydro One would be detrimental to Ontario’s financial situation; and

“Whereas the Liberal government has removed independent oversight of Hydro One, including the Auditor General and the Ombudsman.

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately stop the sale of Hydro One.”

It’s signed by many people in my riding, including from Wilberforce. I’ll hand it to page Catherine.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have another petition here.

“Whereas ... the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and the quality of life for future generations;

“Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs;

“Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents’ physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

“Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

“Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

“Whereas the placement of a landfill in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers is detrimental;

“Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To implement a moratorium in Oxford county, Ontario, on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full and comprehensive review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

“That this review of alternatives would give particular emphasis to (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can be practically and efficiently recycled or reused so as to not require disposal.”

Thank you again very much for the time to present this petition.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The time for petitions is over.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTING STUDENTS ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 PROTÉGÉANT LES ÉLÈVES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 18, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act to amend the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 and the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 37, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2007 sur les éducatrices et les éducateurs de la petite enfance et la Loi de 1996 sur l'Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I believe that last time, the member from Oshawa had the floor. The member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm pleased to resume my talk from yesterday. I was just starting to get on a roll, so I will do my best to get back on that roll. But we'll start from the beginning. I'm pleased—

Interjection: Keep on rolling, rolling, rolling.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad that the members from the opposition have something to sing about, but here we are debating the Protecting Students Act, so that's where I'm going to begin.

This act, Bill 37, amends the Ontario College of Teachers Act, as we've heard. It's based on 49 recommendations from the LeSage report. It essentially makes the disciplinary process for provincial teachers more clear and transparent. I was glad to have had the opportunity yesterday to speak at length, and I would like to reiterate that we support this necessary piece of legislation.

We recognize that very few teachers will ever be affected by this legislation, which deals with exceptions. All teachers are in positions of influence, authority and trust. Almost all teachers value and protect our children and teach professionally with integrity and with the best interests of our students at heart. Those who violate that trust, however, and are found guilty should be disciplined firmly and appropriately.

New Democrats support tough legislation that protects kids and ensures fair due process. We absolutely must have proper oversight and measures in place to ensure that crimes are punished and our children are protected.

As I said yesterday, there is nothing more important than the safety and psychological well-being of our children. We've heard our critic for the NDP from Windsor West speak at length about what a safe and supportive learning environment should look like in our education system. Across the province, we hear about unsafe learning environments or stressed learning environments. The Auditor General points at the \$15-billion backlog when it comes to repairs in our schools.

We talk about learning environments. We've heard about temperature extremes affecting learning, affecting the well-being of our children—those who have to sit in cold classrooms in their coats, or in sweltering heat.

While I don't expect the Liberal government to control the weather, we do need to be having conversations about safe and appropriate learning environments and what those look like.

Also, when it comes to safety equipment, when it comes to appropriate learning materials, I had the opportunity yesterday to mention that where there are funding gaps, oftentimes our teachers reach into their own pockets and do their best to offset those. I have never met a teacher who will let their children go without, whether that is art supplies that need to be replenished, whether that is new shoes when they outgrow their own, whether that is granola bars for snacks, whether that is pencils or backpacks, whether that is children who can't go on field trips for financial reasons. For all of this, we do our best. I have met so many teachers who do their best to ensure that that child has the best education they can have. That is not just protecting students—obviously, those aren't safety things—but that is protecting their best interests and doing their best to safeguard their potential.

One of the things with this bill, which is called the Protecting Students Act, is not what's in it, which we support, as we've talked about—and I spoke at length yesterday—but what isn't in it. There are conversations to be had. I'd like to use my time today to focus on an issue that has come to my attention, with specifics being local—I'm sure that teachers and educators across the province, once they know this is a conversation that is being had, are going to be forthcoming with their specifics in ridings across the province—and that is the issue of violence in our schools. Bill 37 chooses to omit that in this.

As the critic for community safety and correctional services, I have the opportunity to talk about personal protective equipment—Kevlar vests, things like that—with some of our stakeholders and our first responders. I never thought I would stand in this Legislature and have this conversation about grade 2 teachers and personal protective equipment, but that's what I want to talk about. I want to talk about escalating violence. I want to talk about a lack of funding for special education—that we're seeing fewer resources, we're seeing fewer supports, and now we're seeing fewer options.

We're here to talk about protecting students. We have things like evacuations happening in our schools when there are violent incidents. I'm not talking about things we see on the news; I'm talking about children who aren't getting the supports that they need. Some of our special-needs children are no longer getting the supports that they need and are in a state of agitation. The behaviours can become violent. We now have policies in place like “hold and secure,” where classrooms are locked tight, locked down, where students can't leave to go to the washroom. Last week, we had one of our schools in hold and secure for four hours over lunchtime. No one could leave. No one could go home for lunch. No one could leave to use the washroom. That is standard now. That is something that children are getting used to:

hold and secure, regular classroom evacuations. It's less and less the exception and more and more what is becoming the norm. Violence should not be expected. Imagine the psychological impact of regular immersion in violence or unpredictable circumstances. How will that affect their learning? How does that affect their relationships? What will that look like when they leave the system and enter our society? When we're underfunding and cutting special education, and we're not ensuring that special education money is going where it should, we are creating dangerous, untenable situations.

A little bit of background and getting specific: Behaviour safety plans are used when there's a need, and they are legally binding documents. They're more and more common for mainstream classroom teachers. Right now, in classrooms, teachers are being mandated, where there is predictable violence, to wear heavy, bulletproof, bite-proof Kevlar—Kevlar. How can a grade 2 teacher be expected to inspire, to teach, to engage in learning and to bend to tie shoes when wearing fully weighted Kevlar hoodies and Kevlar shin guards all day, every day? If it's dangerous enough for Kevlar in our classrooms, how can we ensure that our kids are safe? I would say that we can't.

1610

Children who are so unsupported by the system that they are consistently agitated and violent are not getting the supports or education that they deserve. How is that protecting students? Children whose learning is regularly interrupted by evacuations or violent behaviours are not getting a safe and secure education. They're learning about violence. They're learning about violence without consequence. The Minister of Education can assert that children have the opportunity to learn in safe and secure environments. She didn't say "hold and secure."

We've heard from a teacher who was locked out of her classroom over lunch during a hold and secure. One of her primary students suffered terrible psychological distress because it triggered past trauma; she was terrified. That may be the exception, but we're going to hear more and more about how this is affecting our classrooms. We need to be protecting our students. This is happening in my riding. We're going to be hearing about it happening in your ridings. Kevlar hoodies—look it up. Kevlar hoodies are real. They're not bulletproof vests; they are Kevlar hoodies.

Stop cutting our special education funding. Stop putting students last. Normalized violence, violence towards teachers without consequence, evacuations, hold and secure, and Kevlar body armour should not be a part of our education system. Every student has the right to a safe and secure, positive nurturing and learning environment. Please strengthen our education system.

I think I'm out of time.

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

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I rise in response to some of the comments made by the member from Oshawa. She started off by talking about—I thought it very inter-

esting—influence, authority and trust, the positions that teachers are in. But then she digressed, Speaker, and I was listening in vain for her to talk about the bill. But I didn't hear her speak at all about the bill and then I was waiting to see if perhaps you might rule to say she should speak to the bill. My point was that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You might want to sit. When I stand, you sit.

You don't surmise or think what I should be doing. If you stand up and have a point of order and say that she wasn't sticking to the bill, then I might have an answer for you. But don't think for me. Thank you.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. Certainly, I wouldn't dare think for you, but I was thinking for myself. That said, the point I was trying to make, though, is that I can only assume that the member from Oshawa chose not to speak to the bill because she had nothing to criticize about the bill. I took that as a sign that she chose to speak about other issues because she found that the bill and the focus of the bill, which is around improving teacher disciplinary practices and processes—that she was onside with it, because in the seven minutes that I heard her speak, and I have to admit I didn't hear her speak yesterday, she did not in any way at all criticize or critique the bill that was put forward. So I really want to thank her for her tacit support, I guess.

I look forward to speaking more to this bill later on when I get that opportunity. I hope that the entire House will support this good initiative.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member for Prince Edward—Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I won't try and think what you're thinking either because I know there's a lot that goes on in that head.

I just want to bring some comments on the remarks from the member for Oshawa, who's a former teacher. It's not that long ago that she was actually teaching in a classroom before joining us here in the Legislature. So I think she has a pretty good handle and has a lot of colleagues who are still teaching in classrooms that know the situation that we're facing in Ontario today.

While I think probably—the member opposite says she didn't talk about the bill. I think maybe what the member from Oshawa was saying was that there are probably a lot of other things that could have been included in the bill that haven't been included in this bill, like safety for teachers in the classroom. It's something that I've heard an awful lot about, too, when I'm meeting with teachers in Prince Edward—Hastings riding.

My wife is a teacher, and I know we all have family members who are teachers in this Legislature. We hear the stories. Quite often, they are horror stories that we hear from teachers in the classroom. There have been some terrible situations and there have been some crimes that have occurred in the classroom, too. That's what this bill is actually addressing: making sure that those teachers who have been convicted of a crime, particularly child porn and sexual abuse crimes, are removed from

the classroom. I think that only makes sense for everybody in this Legislature and for everybody in Ontario.

However, we have to make sure that we have that balance so there's not some kind of a witch hunt going on. We have to make sure that there is a full investigation and the courts have the opportunity to hear the case.

We were talking about that earlier this afternoon when we were talking about the first-ever Access to Justice Week in Ontario, that we have to make sure we have that access to justice, and that justice can occur, so that we can weed out these bad apples when they are convicted of these crimes. There aren't a lot of them, but there are enough that we have to have legislation to look after it.

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

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The government chooses to use certain names for the bill. The bill is entitled Protecting Students. Once you name a bill Protecting Students, it opens up the door to discussing what this bill is doing to protect students, which opens up the door to a discussion around protecting students in a classroom.

Just to provide some background to the minister, the government needs to be very careful with the names that they provide for their bills, because it opens up the door to "Let's talk about the bill's name," which is Protecting Students, and, "Is this government doing a good job of doing that?"

Well, the reality is we have crumbling infrastructure in our schools. No, students aren't being protected in that scenario. When we don't have proper heating or cooling in schools, no, the government is not actually protecting our students. When we have scenarios where students aren't provided with the resources they need so that they don't end up in situations where they're acting out, then, no, the government is not protecting students.

They're very appropriate, I think, the comments made by the member. As a teacher herself, she speaks from her personal experience. She was able to talk about some of the realities that teachers face. She talked about some of the serious issues that need to be addressed, and some serious shortfalls that this government has committed in terms of their mismanagement of the education file, their disrespect of teachers, throwing classrooms into chaos, all of which does not protect students.

Any time you have scenarios where classrooms are in chaos—any time you have scenarios where there's unpredictability in the education system—this puts our students' education at risk. The member was able to talk on those points.

I think, moving forward, the most important area for our government to invest in, if we want to have a strong future for the next generation, is education. We need to ensure that we have the best education system. We need to ensure that by providing the right resources and funding.

On a personal note from the Peel region, the government has horribly mismanaged ensuring that the population is met with the right resources. That funding formula needs to change, and the government needs to do something about it.

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

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I too am going to have an opportunity to speak at a bit more length later on this afternoon on the bill, but I just want to make a few comments to the member from Oshawa.

First of all, let me say how delighted I am, because in her opening remarks, I think she said that they're going to support this bill. I think I heard that from the official opposition as well. It doesn't happen very often that we all have the best interests of whatever we're going to debate. Unfortunately, it doesn't happen often enough.

Mr. Speaker, I hear the opposition saying we have lousy bills. Well, I think we had a pretty clear agenda on where this government was going, and we're progressing going down the road.

Let me say, Speaker—and I'll be more detailed about this—we're going through this exercise, and it is for the protection of kids. It is for the protection of other staff within the education system. Maybe this wasn't an issue 50 years ago. Maybe this wasn't an issue 20 years ago. But society changes, and we see this every day, even in the work we do around this place.

So, although we hear comments like "Well, there should have been a lot more," I'm not sure what "a lot more" is when you're trying to get to the core of a particular issue.

I'm just going to end by saying I'm delighted we support this bill. I think it's going in the right direction, and I look forward to this coming for a vote and seeing everybody in this House supporting it, because I think the teachers deserve it, the students deserve it and the education system deserves it. Thank you, Speaker.

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

1620

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm always glad to hear the thoughtful comments from around the room. I was glad to continue my remarks from yesterday. I had almost a full 12 minutes yesterday to speak at length about the bill and will remind the minister that she was here. Anyway, I'm glad to add a few more comments today and expand upon the title of the bill, the Protecting Students Act.

I would like to say, as I had said before, we have opportunities to protect students. The specifics of this bill, we entirely support the spirit of. When we were discussing it in committee, the focus was on due process and ensuring that is secure, but absolutely our children and their well-being and safety is most important. We support the legislation, but we support our students. We are always going to take the opportunity to stand in this Legislature and bring attention to issues as they arise.

To the member from Northumberland-Quinte West, this may not have been an issue 50 years ago and they may not have had Kevlar 50 years ago. This sounds so extreme. Stop and think about a grade 2 mainstream teacher wearing standard-issue Kevlar hoodies and shin guards. This is now becoming what is required with the behaviour/safety plans more and more, as there is not the

appropriate funding for special education. In our small class placements, they're being forced to make challenging decisions. Those children are not getting what they need. Then we're finding out that Kevlar is becoming the norm. Those are important conversations to be had.

"Protecting Students," as my colleague says, opens the door to have that conversation. I would say that money and resources should go to addressing the problems, not just dressing them in Kevlar hoodies and shin guards.

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

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'm delighted one more time this afternoon to stand and speak to Bill 37. I just want to say upfront that I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and the MPP for Northumberland–Quinte West.

I'm pleased to stand in the House today and speak in support of the Protecting Students Act, which would, if passed, make important amendments to the Ontario College of Teachers Act.

We know that the vast majority of Ontario teachers do an excellent job supporting our students. I know how hard educators and school teams in my riding of Mississauga East–Cooksville and across this great province are working to ensure that each and every student under their care is being supported.

Every day, these teachers work tirelessly inside and outside the classroom. They're dedicated to our students' success and are passionate advocates for their safety and security. It is because of their efforts that we have seen so much progress in our schools over the past 13 years.

We're also seeing more students graduating from high school than ever before. Back in 2004, only 68% of high school students were graduating within five years. Today 85.5% of students are graduating within five years and moving on to their initial post-secondary destinations, including apprenticeship training, college, community living, university or directly into the workforce. This means approximately 190,000 additional students have graduated than would have if the graduation rate remained at the 2004 level.

Students are entering a fast-paced global economy that is far more challenging and interconnected, and that is why we need to support the development of a highly skilled workforce. This is a shared responsibility and we will work with our partners, including employers and educators, to help build a strong and dynamic workforce.

Our progress is the result of a collective focus by the entire education sector to pursue ambitious goals for our students. This focus builds on the good work we have done and establishes four ambitious goals: achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being and enhancing public confidence.

We've been able to make significant progress in all of these goals because of the commitment, professionalism and dedication of Ontario's teachers. Our teachers have also been instrumental as we implement new and exciting initiatives that will take our education system to the next

phase of student success. They have worked tirelessly to prepare their classrooms to accommodate their young students throughout the day.

It goes without saying that everyone in this Legislature knows what kind of incredible influence a teacher can have in the lives of children. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give credit where it's due: I really liked the way the member from Oshawa phrased it when she said that teachers are in a position of influence, authority and trust. I know this from personal experience, because when I was 12 years old, I went off to a boarding school. As you can imagine, if you're in a boarding school and you're 12 years old, your entire life is dependent on teachers. You don't get to go home to your parents. There's nobody that you can go home to and say, "I was bullied today" or "I'm finding homework difficult today." Your world is your teachers.

So I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this bill is particularly close to my heart, because I spent from the age of 12 until I graduated from high school in a boarding school, where from the time we woke up to the time we went to bed, it was teachers who took care of us, teachers who not only taught us the academic lessons, but they instilled the values that I carry today, as well as they taught us life lessons. For me, I understand not only what a great teacher can be like, but sometimes, very rarely, if there is a teacher who isn't doing what they're supposed to, it can be devastating for students. It is in that context that we're bringing this bill forward.

As we all know, a great teacher can make the words of a good book come to life. A great teacher can show you how an abstract math problem can have a real-world application. A great teacher can see the potential for success in every child. Along with quality, dedicated teachers, teachers also ensure our students are able to learn in a safe and accepting environment. Students who feel safe, welcome and connected to school are more likely to succeed academically. That is why we need the Protecting Students Act to become law. We were very pleased yesterday to see both opposition parties supporting this important piece of legislation.

We have an ongoing commitment to students' safety in Ontario. While we know that the vast majority of teachers are committed to the success and safety of their students, we need to ensure that in those rare circumstances where discipline is necessary, teachers, students, parents and administrators can count on a disciplinary system that is transparent, fair and effective.

The Ontario College of Teachers is an independent regulatory body that is responsible for regulating the teaching profession in Ontario, including disciplinary proceedings. These proposed changes would help give the college the tools it needs to ensure there is a transparent process in place when disciplinary action is required. It would also give the college an increased ability to protect our students when there may be an immediate danger to a student.

Most of the proposed changes in the bill reflect recommendations from a review of the college's investigation

and disciplinary procedure, conducted by the Honourable Justice Patrick LeSage. Justice LeSage's report contained 49 recommendations to modernize the Ontario College of Teachers' investigation and discipline practice. Since the release of the report, our government has been working closely with the college to address all 49 of the recommendations.

I want to acknowledge the leadership at the college for not only asking Justice LeSage to conduct the review, but also for moving quickly to address his recommendations. However, while the government and the college have been working hard to address many of the recommendations, some of these recommendations require legislative changes, and that is why we have brought forward the Protecting Students Act. The proposed legislation and subsequent regulations in the Protecting Students Act would improve the college's disciplinary process, reduce the potential for conflicts of interest and help increase the protection of our students.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that quite extensive details of the legislation have been covered in the debate yesterday as well as a little bit today, but I want to take this opportunity to talk about a few key elements of the bill.

1630

First, the legislation would, if passed, ensure that a teacher's certificate is automatically revoked if they have been found guilty of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography.

Mr. Speaker, I'm really proud and pleased to say that this is an area where we are actually proposing stronger provisions than what Justice LeSage originally recommended. Here's a great example of the government going the extra mile. While LeSage did not recommend mandatory revocation of a certificate, we don't believe there is any reasonable circumstance where there is a confirmed case of sexual abuse or child pornography where a teacher should be able to keep their teaching certificate. I suspect that many in this Legislature would agree with that: that we are building on what Justice LeSage had suggested and going beyond what he had suggested.

There's also provision in the bill that would prevent an individual from reapplying to the college for a teaching certificate for five years if they have been found guilty of sexual abuse or child pornography. While someone could reapply after five years, there would have to be a public hearing of the discipline committee to determine whether or not their certificate should be reissued. In addition, a notation of every revocation of a certificate of registration is kept on the college's public register forever.

The five-year time period is an increase compared to the minimum of one year, as currently provided in the Ontario College of Teachers Act. The five-year time period is also consistent with other regulated professions in the health sector.

Finally, all I would like to say, given that I'm coming up to my time, is that this proposed legislation, if passed, would strengthen the authority of the Ontario College of Teachers to take action while ensuring the process is open and transparent for everyone involved. This is one

more example of our commitment to improve student safety and well-being so our children have every opportunity to succeed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate? The Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

Hon. David Zimmer: Thank you, Speaker, for recognizing me. I'm happy and indeed very interested to speak to Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act.

I want to give some of the premises of the bill, or the underlying philosophy of the bill. The underlying philosophy of the bill is protecting the safety of our children and students and maintaining the integrity of the teaching profession. That's a top priority for our government. The bill is both about students and about maintaining the integrity of the teaching profession. The Protecting Students Act, 2016, is the next step in our government's partnership with the Ontario College of Teachers to improve its teacher discipline practices and processes.

Ontario's teachers, and I want to be clear about this, do an excellent job supporting our students. It is in rare circumstances where discipline is required, and when it is required, the discipline must be fair, transparent and decisive. It's a process that is necessary to maintain the public interest and, above all, protect our children. Protecting our children is in the public interest.

If passed, the Protecting Students Act and the subsequent regulations which will follow would make the Ontario College of Teachers' disciplinary processes more efficient. It will better help to protect students and teachers and it will reduce potential conflicts of interest. In short, everybody—teachers, students, parents, government and the college—will know what the rules are. We are taking an important step to make sure that Ontario's families continue to have confidence that their children are safe and protected in school.

Let me say something about the costs of the legislation. In this era of restraint, costs are always a topic to be considered. There would be no financial implications for the government in implementing Bill 37 as currently drafted. The Ontario College of Teachers and the College of Early Childhood Educators are independent bodies that are funded through their own membership fees. Costs to stakeholders, such as school boards, would be negligible and mainly related to the implementation of administrative requirements for reporting responsibilities.

Having said that by way of background, what is actually being proposed in the legislation? The proposed legislation would amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act to do the following:

(1) Require the automatic revocation of a member's certificate by a discipline panel if a member is found guilty of sexual abuse or acts relating to child pornography.

(2) The act would require the publication of all decisions of the discipline committee on the Ontario College of Teachers website. This is an important piece to the legislation because this goes to transparency and to openness. On an issue as sensitive as this, it's important that

the process and the end results of the process be open and transparent to parents, to other teachers, to school boards and, indeed, to the public generally.

(3) The act would set very clear rules for the use of the dispute resolution process.

(4) It would provide employers with clarification regarding the reporting of members whose duties have been restricted. That's a very important point because if there is a disciplinary process that results in some action, then that result—that discipline, if you will—has to be available to users, be they school boards or early education centres or, indeed, parents.

(5) The act would provide authority to the Ontario College of Teachers to disclose information about members to police and to other regulators. Again, this goes to the requirement for transparency, openness, full disclosure and the like.

(6) The act would improve timelines for the investigation and consideration of complaints. That's an important piece because if there is a situation out there that has given rise to a complaint, it is so terribly important that that complaint be dealt with quickly, efficiently and fairly. I want to emphasize that the complaint will be dealt with quickly and in a timely way, recognizing, of course, all the requirements: due process, fairness and so on. But the key here is that if there is a complaint out there, it should not be left to just hang there for months or sometimes a year or more, because there is the potential for great harm to students and great harm to the reputation of the college and to the teaching profession if these complaints aren't disposed of in a timely way. They may be disposed of in a timely way that results in discipline, or they may be disposed of in a timely way such that the complaint perhaps ends up unfounded. But in either case, it's important to resolve the matter quickly, for obvious reasons.

Let me say something about how Bill 37 differs from Bill 103 or Bill 200. When introduced, the Protecting Students Act, 2016—that was Bill 200—only a few additional amendments were made from the original bill, which was introduced in 2013. That was Bill 103. What this—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Speaker, I don't think the government has a quorum today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Could the Clerks' table check for a quorum, please?

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): A quorum is not present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. William Short): A quorum is now present, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Continue.

Hon. David Zimmer: Speaker, I should have said at the beginning that I was going to share my time with the member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Okay. The member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me great pleasure to speak about Bill 37. In the very short time that I have, just let me say that I think everybody in this House shares the respect that we all have for our teachers. I have family members who are teachers. I had the opportunity at one time to teach a trade, and I'll be the first one to admit that in my younger days I didn't have the patience to do that and I chose another path.

Let me just, at a high level, talk about what this bill is trying to accomplish. I think we all said, from all sides of the House, that very, very few teachers in their profession are going to be impacted. Those, I would say, are the rotten apples. It's unfortunate that as a government we have to pass legislation to do this, but I think for the safety of the co-workers in the teaching profession—whether it's teachers or support staff—and, of course, of our students, we have to pass legislation to make sure that we deal with issues that arise.

Back in my municipal days, in rural Ontario, in the Brighton township of the day, we had to pass a bylaw to regulate barking dogs because one person complained out of the 5,000 people who lived there. Unfortunately, to make sure things are looked after, you have to do that.

This is only going to impact a few teachers.

I wish I had a little bit more time to delve into more of the issues. The important thing, as I said in my previous comments, is that I'm delighted that we're on board on this and that it will be passed and dealt with.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a privilege to stand, on behalf of my residents of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, to speak on this bill. It is an important bill. It is a bill that has taken a long time. I think the report has been out for four years now. This is the third attempt to put this through. Last time, it sat a long time on the order paper, not being passed. Of course, it died twice when the House was prorogued. It is something that needs to be addressed. I think everybody agrees with that—protecting students.

The minister opposite talked about the need to be open and transparent. We hope that's a change for this government, because we haven't seen that before, where they talked about the need to be open and transparent. We've seen basically everything else. One of the acts of proroguing actually was the responsibility of a government that seemed to be worried about providing information. Of course, we saw the emails deleted and the changes over the last few years with removing some of the functions of the Auditor General and the chief financial officer. That doesn't speak to a government that's interested in being open and transparent. So it might be a change, but we'll see what comes through.

We now have another issue with the Auditor General where we're not getting a government that's signing off that they've released all of the information on the audit.

These are important issues that the people of Ontario should be very upset with. They need to know exactly what's going on in this province because that's how

democracies work. They work based on the knowledge of the people.

So it is time to see this bill go through, and we're very happy to see that this government is taking these steps.

I see that my time is running out. I'll talk later on.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Every bill that comes through this House is extremely important. We're debating this bill, Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act. We all know the relevant role that teachers play in the lives of students. Sometimes—and very few times—things can go wrong, so we do need some guidance and framework and structure to ensure that when something of that gravity happens, there's a process in place.

The objective of the legislation, of course, is to protect students by making the disciplinary process for the province's teachers more clear and transparent. That's good for the students, and it's also good for the teachers, because it ensures that the due process that's in place is going to be hopefully not a slow process—it's going to move things along—and that they can have a forum in order to argue the allegations and they can come to a proper decision. Then, of course, there's repercussions for that. The overall thrust of the bill—I think we all agree that we need to protect our students and there should be due process when these things come forward.

It's great to have this debate. I look forward to hearing more about the debate. It's just something that is really needed in this province. I think we need to look at many ways of how to protect our seniors too. There are a lot of seniors that come into my office, and they have concerns. Protecting our most vulnerable—we have our children and our seniors.

This bill is a good initiative to make sure that there's clarity around the process when these allegations come forward.

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

Mrs. Cristina Martins: As a proud mother of two young boys—very bright boys, may I add—André and David, who are enrolled in our public school system in our province, I'm pleased to stand up here today and add to the debate this afternoon on Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act. But before I do, I want to take a moment to thank all of the wonderful teachers in my riding of Davenport and across the province, who, day in and day out, do such a wonderful job in teaching our students, supporting our students, protecting our students and keeping our students safe. So a big “thank you” to all of you.

School safety has been a priority for this government from the beginning. Every student has the right to feel safe at school, and every parent deserves peace of mind, knowing that their child is safe. That's why I'm proud of the proposed Protecting Students Act that would make the Ontario College of Teachers' disciplinary processes more efficient and help better protect students and teachers. We want to make sure Ontario families continue to

have the confidence that their children are safe and protected in school.

We're not the only ones that think this way. I have a quote here from Michael Salvatori, registrar with the Ontario College of Teachers, who says: “We are committed to ensuring that Ontario teachers support student success and achievement. That's why, working with the government, we are keen to strengthen our disciplinary processes. In the rare cases where discipline is required, teachers, parents and students know that a fair, timely and transparent process will be in place.”

I know that, if passed, this piece of legislation would make the Ontario College of Teachers' disciplinary processes more efficient, help protect students and teachers and reduce the potential for conflicts of interest. I'm glad that our government is taking this important step, and that this step is being recognized by all sides of this House to make sure Ontario families continue to have the confidence that our children are safe and protected in school.

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

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Speaker. To you and, through you, to the members of the House: It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to the debate on Bill 37. I'll have a chance maybe later today to speak further to it.

I've checked with my office staff, and fortunately—I've been here a number of years now—at least in the years I've been here, we haven't had a case in our riding, thank God, that has come before us. I think there were some a few years before that. So I can see the reason for legislation like this.

Transparency was lacking with the Ontario College of Teachers in the past. They asked themselves, after a number of incidents, I understand, in 2011, for a review. The government appointed Justice LeSage to take a look at that. He came forward with a number of recommendations—almost 50—at the time that would recommend a number of improvements, like a communications website, where people could actually see if someone was under suspension somewhere else in the province, if they happened to be teaching their children, so it wouldn't slip through.

1650

I applaud those kinds of improvements. Certainly, as does everybody who spoke today, we want to see that our children and grandchildren—I have grandchildren now in the system and certainly we want to see them, and my nieces and nephews as well, protected.

I support this legislation and, like everyone else, we want to see it implemented as soon as possible. If there are improvements to be made to it, that's fine with me as well. I look forward to the rest of the debate today and I'm sure we'll learn more as the afternoon goes on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister has two minutes to respond.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you, Speaker, for recognizing me to do the two-minute wrap-up.

First, let me thank all the members on all sides of the House for their comments. I think, in general, as I said in my couple of minutes prior, we're on the same page.

In the 10 or so years I've had the opportunity to be here at Queen's Park—10, 11 years—plus 12 years in the municipal sector, I visited a lot of schools within my riding. I had the opportunity—I still do—to speak to a lot of grade 5s, grade 10s and grade 12s about civics. I get to meet a lot of teachers, Speaker, I really do. I can tell you, I have full confidence in those teachers. That I know of, I don't think Bill 37, if it's passed, would ever impact any of those great teachers in my riding of Northumberland—Quinte West in any way, shape or form. But it will create a sense of security for them. It will create a sense of security for the parents, for the kids who go to those schools, just in case an incident were to happen.

I'm grateful we're finally at this stage. We've heard comments that this should have been done a long time ago. A couple of things got in the way, Speaker. There was a forced election due to a minority government. That kind of put things back on track. That was no fault of government of the day. They wanted to keep on governing.

And then there was prorogation, yes, and we made a commitment that every piece of legislation would come back and that's why we're debating this today. That prorogation only lasted one work day, if I remember correctly, maybe two. I'm not sure.

So we're here. I'm glad it's going to go through. I'm hopeful it goes through. Let's get on with it.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'll be sharing my time with the member from Sarnia—Lambton.

I'm pleased to offer remarks on Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act. Teachers play a pivotal role in a child's development. As a family with four teachers, I certainly hear the issues every day that they experience at work. I know the care and the extra time they put in. There's no shortage of work and care that our teachers put in. The public, and parents in particular, place an incredible amount of trust in the teaching profession and students are incredibly impressionable, especially when they are very young.

Teachers are regulated by the College of Teachers, a body tasked with ensuring the profession complies with the highest professional and ethical standards. Sexual abuse of children by educators is a circumstance our communities would never wish upon their worst enemies.

Recent police operations show that there is no stereotypical user of child pornography. Any category of people or professionals is vulnerable to having some bad apples among them. With educators, the issues of child abuse and child pornography acquire an additional upsetting dimension that involves a breach of a deep bond of trust between the parent, the student and the educator.

It is definitely time to update legislation governing educator licensing and discipline to reflect the particular

stigma our society rightly places on abusers and those found using child pornography.

The legislation has been before the House several times and it has repeatedly died due to dissolutions and prorogations. The LeSage report is now four years old and counting, released all the way back in 2012, so we are seeing the bill once again introduced. The first time, it sat there for two years and still the government had not conducted enough debate to get it through the House.

The current framework for disciplinary procedures at the College of Teachers has needed to change since a 2011 Toronto Star report into what many defined as "lenient treatment" of teachers accused and found guilty of professional misconduct. Lack of transparency in how disciplinary hearings were conducted did nothing to shore up the public trust.

The LeSage report recommended, first and foremost, clear and defined timelines for all parties to supply information and responses pertaining to an investigation. Ambiguity generates confusion and mutual suspicion between boards, professionals, labour representatives and the public.

LeSage further recommended that the duties of the discipline and dispute resolution processes be defined much more clearly, such that any misconduct or offence that would result in admonishment or a caution should enter the dispute resolution stream and generally not be entered into the public register, while serious complaints, such as those involving abuse, should only be dealt with in a public disciplinary hearing.

It sounds inconceivable in this day and age that educators found guilty of abuse or accessing child pornography may, depending on the committee's decision, avoid the revocation of their certificate.

The report also recommended a public website where information about disciplinary hearings could and should be posted with regular updates. The PC caucus and I will continue to insist on a similar system for the public to access information about educators and teachers who have had their certificate revoked for abuse or child pornography reasons.

Reporting obligations and the framework to protect those who report potential instances of abuse have been recommended by the Baldwin inquiry, amongst others.

We must, at all times, remember that our first and foremost obligation, as both legislators and members of the public, is to our children and preserving their well-being.

Being found guilty of abuse or a child pornography offence should imply an automatic cancellation of your teaching privileges—no ifs, ands or buts. The PC caucus would explore strengthening the bill and the protection of the public trust in the teaching and education profession by calling upon immediate leave without pay for those professionals accused of, or being investigated for, acts of misconduct.

Other regulated professionals already include protection for their members from frivolous and vexatious complaints, and it wouldn't take such a significant effort

to transpose those principles into the College of Teachers.

I'm sure most people here are familiar with the TV show *Breaking Bad* and the involvement in the drug trade. Under this bill, such offences would fall through the cracks.

We hold teachers and educators to a higher standard of professional conduct, higher than other members of the general public, exactly due to the amount of trust we place in them. Regulatory bodies charged with enforcing professional codes of conduct and professional discipline should therefore be tirelessly committed to the principle of transparency in their operations. There are no benefits to secrecy in a self-regulating profession when it affects our children.

I see that the government has titled this bill the Protecting Students Act. I think there were some comments made before by a member of the third party that talked about some of the issues that we are seeing in schools. I really wonder about this bill, if it's really going to hit the mark in protecting our students in all areas.

There also needs to be, as the member from this side brought up, protection for the teachers as well. We want to make sure that this does not become a witch hunt. We want to make sure that the educators also get a fair hearing.

1700

I know that in my own riding, not too long ago, we were subjected to an inquiry that looked at the possibility of a conspiracy of sexual abuse. After \$60 million being spent on an inquiry, and over many years they came to the result that although there had been sex abuse instances in our riding, as there are all over the province, it highlighted the fact that this is a common problem not only across our province but across the country. We need to put in special cautions and protections for children, some of which are covered in this bill because it is important. It also showed the concern of the public. You want to make sure that both sides are receiving a fair hearing, that it's not just another witch hunt, and there's access to affordable legal services.

The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton made some good points about this Liberal government and the mismanagement of this important file. We want to make sure they get this file right.

Another issue related to the protection of students—in my own riding and the neighbouring ridings, in the Upper Canada District School Board we see a change in the system where we're looking at busing students over long distances to large schools. I wonder: In the spirit of this bill, is that another area where we're failing our children? We talk about the importance of being involved in extracurricular activities, whether it be sports or other events, and when you're putting students on a bus for more than an hour, are we really protecting their educational rights and what we should expect to be provided in this province? It eliminates the opportunities they receive.

In this one report in my riding, we're losing six schools and replacing them with one. So we're losing

five. Think of the opportunities they'll miss there—sports teams and all the things that go along with that. Again, we talk about the need to protect our students. This is another way that we're not protecting our students.

There have been a large number of meetings that have come up; I think it's over 10 meetings in the communities surrounding this. It's got the public upset, but a message from one of the directors—and we're very proud of the system of schools and how well we score. A message came from the director calling the principal at our local school, stressing the importance of reaching a 90% passing rate on the EQAO testing. The principal responded back that he could see that being a huge problem, and they asked him why. He said, "Well, we'd have to get 3% of the students to actually fail, because we're over that mark already." I hear that the average is in the 80s in a test that I think the government has set up really to make it much easier to pass, but it shows the quality of rural schools. Sometimes there's more to school than just the selection of courses. It's all about the quality of the teachers and the quality of the environment they're in, and we certainly want to see that continued.

I know I'd better let the member from Sarnia speak because I know he wants to talk about this important issue. Thanks for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. John Fraser): The member from Sarnia.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity. You look great in the Chair there. Thank you to my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for allowing me to share some time with him.

With that, I'd like to speak to Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act. This, I believe, is the third time that the Minister of Education for the government has introduced this particular piece of legislation. Hopefully, we'll prioritize the bill during this session of Parliament so we will actually see it become legislation.

For most pieces of legislation, it's easy to relate them back to situations in the riding. It is either to support or make the case for opposition to a particular government policy based on how that issue plays out at home—in my case, the riding of Sarnia–Lambton. Bill 37 is not one of those bills, fortunately. I can't recall a local media story that deals with the item central to this bill, which is good. I'm not saying it hasn't happened, but it certainly hasn't been a recurring issue like rising hydro rates, for example. I've checked with my office staff in the constituency, and we haven't dealt with any issues related to teacher discipline in recent history. I suppose that is part of the reason that legislation like this is needed. Transparency has been lacking in the past from the Ontario College of Teachers.

My understanding is that this bill was drafted following a series of media reports in early 2011 indicating that at that time there were serious problems with the disciplinary system of the College of Teachers. In August 2011, the Honourable Patrick LeSage, who at the time was counsel at a Toronto law firm, Gowling, was retained by the Ontario College of Teachers to conduct

such a review into their intake, investigation and discipline procedures and practices. Justice LeSage was also asked by the College of Teachers to examine and consider issues including communication and publication practices; impartiality and timeliness of adjudication; training and legal support; appropriateness of disciplinary outcomes; confidentiality; and the handling of concerns about its members. Mr. LeSage ended up issuing a 76-page report, with 49 recommendations drafted with the central theme of student safety.

In talking with my caucus colleagues and listening to the debate so far, I am encouraged that this bill has been strengthened since it was last introduced by the previous Minister of Education. Bill 37, the Protecting Students Act, seeks to amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act and the Early Childhood Educators Act in order to continue, as it should, to implement the recommendations stemming from the LeSage report, which was released in 2012. This version of the Protecting Students Act, if passed into law by this government, will implement all 49 recommendations from the LeSage report.

I believe, as has been pointed out, that the majority of the recommendations were made to the Ontario College of Teachers on how it conducts its affairs as a self-regulating body. However, Bill 37 still includes many recommendations that deal with legislative and regulatory matters that would be handled by the Ministry of Education.

This is the third time that this government has brought forward this bill. When this bill was first introduced in 2013 as Bill 103, the official opposition did not feel it went far enough. At that time, my caucus offered support for the bill as a good first step, but we certainly felt that there were elements missing from the bill that needed to be entrenched in legislation. Now, however, I'm pleased to see that Bill 37 will ensure that a teacher's certificate is automatically revoked if he or she has been found guilty of certain forms of sexual abuse or acts related to child pornography. This addresses perhaps the most alarming of the outstanding recommendations in the LeSage report, recommendation 32, which stated: "The penalty for sexual abuse or sexual misconduct by a teacher involving a student should almost invariably be revocation of the member's teaching certificate."

Sexual abuse and exploitation of children are unacceptable crimes on one of the most vulnerable populations in our society. There should be zero tolerance for these types of acts. There's no place for child exploitation in this province, or in any part of society, for that matter. We expect all individuals, regardless of their profession, who engage in this behaviour to be brought to justice.

I will never understand how that wasn't already the standing policy of the College of Teachers, but I am pleased that it will be the policy moving forward, and I applaud the government for that. The fact that it has taken the LeSage report and three cracks by this government at introducing this legislation to make that sort of change really is something that leaves many

people shaking their heads. Really, why has it taken the government so long to move on this file?

The recommendations from the LeSage report were made almost four years ago, in 2012. These key provisions include:

- ensuring a teacher's certificate is automatically revoked, as I said earlier, over those forms of sexual abuse or pornography;

- requiring employers to inform the college when they have restricted a teacher's duties or dismissed him or her for misconduct;

- allowing the college to share this information with the school board if the subject of a complaint is subject to an interim restriction/suspension because he or she poses an immediate risk to a child or student;

- requiring the college to publish all decisions from its disciplinary committee;

- setting clear rules for the use of dispute resolution;

- providing authority to the college to disclose information about its members to police and other regulators; and

- improving timelines for the investigation and consideration of complaints.

Some of these issues, you'd think, would have already been in place. Others here have reviewed this act a lot more than I have. I can't understand how some of these things weren't in place already.

While the Ontario College of Teachers has taken steps to address the recommendations aimed at them, what's clear is that the government has introduced this bill three times and it's gone no further. There have been three education ministers since the first report, and three bills aimed at addressing the recommendations have been tabled, but little concrete action has actually occurred since 2012. Progress on this file is painfully slow. I am hopeful, however, now that a new Minister of Education has taken this issue on, that we will see these recommendations implemented and the legislation move forward.

1710

I sat in on the debate of Bill 37 yesterday—I guess it might have been the day before, now—when my colleague from Huron-Bruce spoke to the bill. She made a lot of very salient comments on both the bill and how this government has managed the education file. It says "managed," but maybe it should be "mismanaged."

I want to reiterate some of that because I thought the member made a very good point. All too often, it seems that the government, regardless of the minister assigned to the portfolio, is having difficulty building a system to match Ontario's needs. A perfect example is how the previous Minister of Education strung along for months the families and students who utilize the most important programs and services of Ontario's demonstration schools. They had no idea if their schools would be open the following school year. They had no idea what they would do.

They had to come down by busloads to try and get the Minister of Education's attention. I had a number of

families from my own riding participate in that. It's disappointing, Mr. Speaker, that it takes this sort of advocacy to get action from this ministry. It only took one meeting with students and parents from my riding of Sarnia–Lambton who were enrolled at the Amethyst demonstration school to realize how really important this school is in our education system, and more importantly, to the education of their children. I had a long-time friend of mine—he was my campaign manager years ago—say, “The two most important words in education—and you’ll learn them; I learned them when I first started teaching—are ‘my kid.’” He said, “It doesn’t matter what the rest of the rules are or what the arguments are; the two most important words to that individual you’re sitting across from are ‘my kid.’”

Anyway, I digress. It took months before the Minister of Education came to the same conclusion. But all that time that the ministry and the government were inactive or refused to prioritize the file led to all kinds of uncertainty and stress.

In conclusion, again, I’m hopeful that we’ll finally see these recommendations made into law and prioritized by this government so that this legislation will move forward for a thorough discussion at committee, and then be brought back here for final reading. If we don’t get that from this government, who knows? We may still be debating this bill in another four years. Let’s hope not. Let’s move forward.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It was interesting listening to the members from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and, of course, Sarnia–Lambton navigate through what is really, quite honestly, a very uncomfortable thing for a lot of people to talk about. Education touches almost every part of our lives. We all know someone who works in the sector. Of course, some of us—many of us—have had children who have gone through the public education system. At the centre of this debate, obviously, should be a principled concept of justice, of fairness and of openness and transparency, because that is really at the root of the problem, quite honestly.

When I had my opportunity to speak to this piece of legislation—which, just for my mom, who’s watching, is Bill 37, Protecting Students Act—I had the opportunity to talk about what happens in a community—not just a school community, but in the broader sense of a community—when false claims are made against those who work in the education system. One, it does destroy a reputation. It destroys that level of trust that exists in that school community. And even when justice is served, when the claims are proven in or out of a court or through the Ontario College of Teachers, the damage still is done. So there has to be a careful balance here with this piece of legislation.

But let me tell you, right now in my community, we are dealing with a situation where the claims appear to be very true. That leaves a black mark on the profession. The colleagues who work in that education environment

are harmed by it. The trust and the balance of integrity of the teaching profession are harmed by it. Most importantly, the children who we entrusted to exist in the system and meet their potential in that system are also harmed. It’s a huge responsibility that we all bear to get this right.

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

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I’m pleased to speak for a couple of minutes to Bill 37, Protecting Students Act. A number of people have talked about the act and the importance of protecting the safety of our students and our children and maintaining the integrity of the teaching profession. That’s a top priority for our government. Certainly, as a mother, it’s a top priority for me, and as a former school community council chair in my neighbourhood, I have some context for this as well.

One thing I do want to touch on, Speaker, that I don’t think is being discussed or hasn’t been discussed yet in this debate—it might be a question in people’s minds—is about a report the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care recently released from the task force on the prevention of sexual abuse of patients. People may wonder if the response to that report impacts this proposed Protecting Students Act, 2016.

Of course, in this bill before us, we’re proposing amendments that would amend the Ontario College of Teachers Act and the Early Childhood Educators Act that are responsive to the recommendations from Justice LeSage. Those are specific to the education sector.

I just want to mention that I know the Ministry of Health is working with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Health may make amendments to the registered health providers act. Certainly, that report has garnered a lot of attention around sexual abuse. Of course, as the minister for women’s issues, my own view is it should never, ever be tolerated. But I know the Minister of Education is working closely with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to share information and see where there may be overlapping or mutual developments.

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

Ms. Laurie Scott: I’m pleased to give comment today on Bill 37, Protecting Students Act, that is before us again for the third time. I want to make comment on my colleagues from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and Sarnia–Lambton, who spoke to the bill.

There’s no question we all agree that sexual abuse and sexual misconduct and exploitation of children is not to be tolerated. When I mentioned earlier that this is the third time we’ve seen this bill, and it’s in reaction to recommendations from the LeSage review, it’s kind of disappointing that the government did not get the recommendations through earlier.

We do have an obligation here to protect our children from abuse. It’s unfortunately on the rise, and it is on the rise a lot because of the increase in pornography. It’s almost becoming somewhat normalizing in society to see

the abuse of children and women. The rise of pornography is not acknowledged enough in our society, the systemic causes that we're seeing. I see that with—my colleague from across the way has held one up—no question, cellular phones. Access to data is a huge impetus to why that is happening.

I speak a lot about human sex trafficking and the age of the children. I think collectively we all certainly need to bring forth legislation such as this. We might make some amendments to actually strengthen it. To say it is not tolerated, we need to educate not only the educators, but also the children to be aware of the signs. There's always a careful balance, of course, when accusations are made, but when charges are brought forward, teachers' licences have to be removed immediately.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I just want to say it's good to hear from the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and the member from Sarnia–Lambton on their contributions to the debate, the Protecting Students Act.

Speaker, there are two schedules to this bill. The first schedule is referencing the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 and then the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996. As I was reading through the bill, there were two items that jumped out at me. They were items that I remember discussing with people who came to Queen's Park and met with me. One of the items was, "The new subsection 9(4) requires the council to ensure that either the registrar or a deputy registrar is fluent in English and French." That's an improvement because, of course, there's a French school board system and we should have that involved in that process.

1720

The other item: I had a meeting and the issue that was brought out was, "The new subsection 17(2.1) provides that a panel of a committee that hears or reviews a matter relating to a principal or vice-principal must include at least one person who is or was a principal or vice-principal."

It's good to see those two things in there because I remember a meeting a couple of years ago with people at Queen's Park on these very issues and they included those two items. It's a good thing that they were listening.

This act is definitely something that—we need to acknowledge that it is happening, that it can happen in the school system. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo touched on it. It is a very uncomfortable subject, but we have to talk about uncomfortable subjects because we need to protect our students.

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

Mr. Jim McDonell: I want to thank the member from Kitchener–Waterloo, the minister responsible for accessibility and women's issues, and the members from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and London–Fanshawe.

The member for Kitchener–Waterloo talked about a fair and open process and the damage done by false claims. I think that's a key part. We have people's lives on the line here. We want to make sure that anybody who is accused gets a fair hearing and an appropriate length of time, because nothing is worse than the rumours that spread around a community—and, of course, this type of thing seems to be at its worst.

The minister responsible for accessibility was talking about bringing on other parts of the act, and I think that's important too. Whether it's schools or health providers, it's all the same thing. It's dealing with our children, and we want to make sure that they're protected.

Of course, our great member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock talked about the exploitation of children and sexual abuse and that we can't stand for it. We have to put a stop to that and some of the many other examples. I know her challenging this bill on the trafficking that's going on in this country—at first glance, people think these are newcomers to the province, newcomers to the country, but no, these are the girls next door. These are people who are getting trapped through the Internet and different areas, and it's something that this government has to move on.

The member from London–Fanshawe was bringing out some good issues on this bill.

My time is running short.

I know that it's way over time—that the report is 2012. We want to see some action. We don't want to see this die again. I'm looking forward to its passage.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I'm now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and a half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

Minister of Northern Developments and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Speaker, I call government order G7.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): You're adjourning the debate?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Adjourn the debate.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

PROMOTING AFFORDABLE HOUSING ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA PROMOTION DU LOGEMENT ABORDABLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 18, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 7, An Act to amend or repeal various Acts with respect to housing and planning / Projet de loi 7, Loi modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois en ce qui concerne le logement et l'aménagement du territoire.

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

Mr. Randy Hillier: Bill 7, the Promoting Affordable Housing Act, is up for debate today. I'll start by saying that in my nine years of experience in the Legislature, I've come to recognize and conclude that the better the title, the more flowery the title of a Liberal bill, the less that it actually achieves. Bill 7 is a good example of a bill sounding lovely, sounding wonderful, but actually achieving little to nothing in practice.

Let's examine a little bit of Bill 7 and the promoting of affordable housing. First, we should start off by looking at some facts. Typically, we would expect a government to look at facts and evidence before they bring in legislation to remedy a problem. In 2003, when this Liberal government took power, the wait time for seniors to get affordable housing in this province was, on average, two and a half years. Thirteen years later, that two-and-a-half-year wait time has increased to four and a half years.

Hon. Michael Coteau: How many more seniors?

Mr. Randy Hillier: This is interesting. I just heard from the minister, "How many more seniors?" This is nearly double the wait time. I know that our population has grown in Ontario in the last 13 years, but it has not doubled. I think even the elementary students could figure out that math—even the ones who may not pass, who the EQAO has so readily identified.

For families in 2003 waiting for affordable housing, the wait time was 2.3 years. It has now increased to 3.7 years.

So for whichever category we want to measure affordable housing and wait times with, the Liberal government has a failing grade in the last 13 years. Wait times are up.

Yes, more people are in need of affordable housing. Of course, with the great increase in electricity costs in this province, it is also further bringing acuity to this problem. People are not only unable to find affordable housing, but then to maintain affordable housing with these rising utility costs is putting further difficulties and exacerbating the problem.

Speaker, we ought to be striving for affordable housing, but in order to reduce the amount of people who need affordable housing and reduce the cost of housing for people, we should take a fact-based approach. We should examine the evidence and then bring in legislation, not bring in legislation and then begin consultations and examinations.

Let me give the House a few facts that they may ponder and discuss with relation to Bill 7.

The GTA housing market from 2005 to 2015: The price of houses in the GTA in that period of time has increased by 71.1%. The consumer price index in the same period of time has increased by 18%. That's since 2005. So is housing becoming more affordable or is it becoming less affordable? Well, the facts say that people are having a harder time finding affordable housing in the GTA.

Here's another important fact for the government to consider. In 2004, just after the Liberal government took power, it took 3.9 years of salary, on average, to buy the average home in Toronto. So the median annual salary

and the median home price was a multiple of 3.9. What is it today in 2015? Well, it's risen to 6.7 years of salary to buy the median home in Toronto.

1730

Has housing become more affordable or less affordable during the government's mandate? Clearly, if it now takes near seven years of annual salary for a home as compared to less than four, the cost of housing is outstripping and outpacing the consumer price index and any other measure.

What have we done? Why has this happened? Because we know, looking back historically, that housing affordability in Toronto actually improved from the years 1971 to 2001. The cost of homes in relation to income was actually improving up until 2001. You can look at all the StatsCan statistical evidence and see that we were on a trend line of improving affordable housing in this province up until 2001, and it has just gotten absolutely, terribly worse since 2004.

Why has that happened? Why has that trend line altered from improving affordable housing to worsening under the Liberal mandate? Is it because of Liberal policies or is it just misfortune and bad luck? I don't think it's just misfortune and bad luck; I think government policies actually have an impact on society. I think government policies actually have an impact on our economy. Government policies actually impact our standard of living, and with respect to the housing market and the affordability of housing, their policies have had a negative influence and have been hurtful.

Speaker, let's look at the bundle of policies and the bundle of circumstances that might lead us to a conclusion about affordable housing. We know labour costs have gone up, but we also know labour costs have gone up in relation to the consumer price index. There hasn't been a great deal of change there; they're pretty well mirroring one another. So it's not increased labour costs that have impacted affordable housing.

We do know that technology and productivity gains have been substantial in actually reducing labour costs in the price of housing. All our new technologies as far as tools and equipment to build a house have improved productivity there. Even new building materials and supplies have lowered the cost of homes. But still, in Ontario, the price of homes and affordability of homes worsens.

So it's not labour, and even with productivity gains and technology gains, the affordability still goes up. What else is there that makes affordability of homes in a worse position today than it was when the Liberal government took power? Well, I can offer a couple of suggestions, and maybe instead of playing Sudoku or doing crossword puzzles on the government side, they may want to listen to this so that they could maybe include some amendments in the bill during—

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I see that the member from Ottawa South got a little upset with me referring to the crosswords and Sudoku being played on the other side.

However, amendments are important and debate is important, so that people can actually understand what they ought to be doing when they get to committee. Here are a couple of suggestions.

We know that before a builder puts a shovel in the ground in the GTA, there's a regulatory cost for that home. Per unit, that cost is now, on average, \$45,092. Before a plumber gets on site, before an architect designs anything, before an electrician gets there or a bricklayer, there's a \$45,000 cost, on average. That's a significant amount of money. Does it impact affordability of homes? I think we would all agree that it does.

Does Bill 7 do anything to alleviate or reduce that built-in regulatory cost? No, it doesn't. It does nothing. But it does actually permit and incent and allow that regulatory cost to increase even more.

So \$46,000. Now, here's another one: On average, in the GTA, to get approval to build a single residential unit takes 17 and a half months to get the approval. That's a cost as well. That's a cost of money. That's a cost of time. It's a cost of lost opportunities. There's a multitude of costs—17 and a half months to get approval to spend the \$45,000 before you get the shovel in the ground. That's astonishing. Do those 17 months have an impact on affordable housing? I think they do, Speaker.

Now, if you happen to be caught in the problem of needing to rezone the property before you apply for the permit and before you spend the \$45,000 up front on costs, it's only another five and a half months, on average, to rezone the property before you start the process of 17 and a half months to get the approval for the building permit. Does it impact affordability? I think it does. I think we can all recognize that that has a big impact.

I think it may lead, and be a significant contributing factor, to why it now takes somebody to work nearly seven years to buy an average house, as compared to 2004, when it took less than four years of salary to buy a house. Am I wrong? I think there's a correlation there. I think there's a correlation.

Hon. Michael Coteau: You're wrong.

Mr. Randy Hillier: If the minister says I'm wrong, I would love to hear—when the minister spoke on this debate, he didn't come up with any solutions here. He didn't say anything at all. During the questions and comments, I will be looking forward to Minister Coteau instead of just heckling—

Hon. Michael Coteau: It's Co'-teau.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): And this is Toto, here; okay? We'll go through me. Continue.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker, and I beg your pardon for the incorrect pronunciation of Minister Coteau when he was heckling me. I will not make that mistake again.

So nearly seven years of salary for a median home. What other elements have contributed to this lack of affordable housing in this province? I would suggest the basic laws of supply and demand, which Minister Coteau may not be aware of, are indeed important laws for us to

recognize. We know this government has restricted the supply of land for building residential units in this province. They have done a restriction of the supply with acts such as the Greenbelt Act. They have also done it with the Places to Grow Act and the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act.

1740

I could go on with a number of different public policy initiatives by this Liberal government which all sound super-duper. The Greenbelt Act, just like the Promoting Affordable Housing Act, sounds good. Who can argue with good, especially the Liberal good? The Places to Grow Act: That sounds great. We should embrace that, right?

But maybe we ought to examine the impact of these things at some point. That's what I'm doing here today: examining the impact, and seeing how the rising cost of housing in Ontario has made housing less affordable, has brought acuity to the problems of seniors and families waiting for affordable homes—as I said, four and a half years now for seniors to wait for affordable homes. These have impacts. These are important. And Bill 7 does nothing. Bill 7 might as well be another Sudoku piece of paper or a crossword, because it does nothing for affordability.

But there is another element of Bill 7, and that is this new imposition on municipalities, under the Residential Tenancies Act, where many rural municipalities are going to face a new burden, placed on them by the provincial government, that they will have to enforce and that they will have to collect on. It will have to look like it's their initiative, but it's really a provincial initiative. The municipalities are not in any position to take on further provincial costs with no additional resources, I know, in rural Ontario. There may be some municipalities in Liberal land which can, but not in the area that I represent—not at all.

I want to go back to that restriction of supply, because there is that law of supply and demand. The greenbelt was 7,200 square kilometres of properties which were taken out of the marketplace. They were extinguished from being able to be built on. You may say that was important and necessary in the name of the environment. I'm not saying that it isn't. I'm just saying we ought to know not only what the positive consequences are, but what the negative consequences are.

In this Liberal government, like the titles of their bills, everything is only positive. There's only positivity in the land. There is no such thing as a negative consequence with a piece of Liberal legislation. Well, I've just demonstrated, Speaker, that there are. Housing affordability has gone down in this province under your watch. They need to start doing some heavy lifting now. They need to start doing some heavy lifting and improve housing affordability in this province, not make it less affordable.

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, I welcome the comments and questions from the other side, now that they are alert and interested in this bill.

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

Ms. Catherine Fife: It is a pleasure, of course, to join this debate and to follow the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

This debate is so very important, because if we can actually get housing right, it will stabilize so many of the issues that we see in our communities across the province, particularly in the GTA, where, as a member has pointed out, homeownership has become cost-prohibitive. On this day, where we are acknowledging Women's History Month and Persons Day, I must also look at this piece of legislation through a gender lens, where particularly women have an incredible challenge before them to actually become homeowners in the GTA and in the province.

The frustration that the member has expressed—we have some similar concerns, but I think that we would approach them very differently. One of the key failures contained in Bill 7, the Promoting Affordable Housing Act, is the lack of rent protection. It is missing from this bill.

I just introduced a petition and wrote the minister a letter about the precariousness and the vulnerability of certain sectors of our population in the province of Ontario who do not have rights, who are not protected under the Landlord and Tenant Board, which needs to be completely and utterly overhauled. I brought the issue of the students in Waterloo and Kitchener who are trying to get into housing in those purpose-built student condos, if you will. Units were not done. This is a problem in London, in Durham, in Toronto, in Kingston, where these students have no recourse. So if you're talking about trying to stabilize people in the province of Ontario with solid housing, then they need recourse. They need rights, and they need those rights to be upheld in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 7.

I take great exception to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington's comments earlier, that the government's not doing enough on the issue of affordable housing. I challenge him about this issue of the proposed legislation, if passed. We are amending a number of existing pieces of legislation: the Planning Act, the Development Charges Act, the Residential Tenancies Act, the Housing Services Act, the Elderly Persons' Housing Aid Act and the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act.

I know he would support our proposed legislation in terms of what we heard from the municipalities. I know he's smiling right now. He understands that municipalities asked us during the consultations about the fact that we need to upgrade the whole issue of inclusive zoning, and the fact that right now, Mr. Speaker—and I can only speak for my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt in the eastern part of the city of Toronto. We consistently hear concerns about affordable housing but, more importantly,

the whole issue of the zoning bylaw in the city of Toronto and, I would say, zoning bylaws across the province of Ontario.

If passed, Bill 7 would enable municipalities to pass zoning bylaws that include inclusionary zoning, which must include a number of pieces. That will allow municipalities to build affordable housing units, which is very important. The member opposite was talking about that. It will also allow for the period of time where affordable housing must be provided and maintained. That's very important. I know the opposition members criticize the government from time to time: that there's no timeline. You go on and on. Well, we are providing some measure about the timeline.

I do value the comments and this opportunity to address this bill, Mr. Speaker. I also welcome the time to debate a little bit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to add comment to my colleague from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington's address on Bill 7, the Promoting Affordable Housing Act.

First of all, his main point, saying that the title sounds better than the actual substance of the bill, is dead on. I've been here several years myself in the Legislature and I do have to give the Liberal government an award for the titles they put on bills, because they are very good.

Interjection: Thank you.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes.

Interjection: No action.

Ms. Laurie Scott: No action, but really good titles.

It has to be the same in all of our ridings. The number of people waiting for affordable housing has increased immensely. We're not fooling ourselves; we are all hearing it. Mine is over five years at least for some type of affordable housing.

1750

So it's double the wait times, 13 years later, now that the Liberal government has been in power. I'm sure this bill tidies up a few things, I'll give you that. It does increase the cost for municipalities, probably more so rural municipalities than urban municipalities. They require them to do an enumeration of homeless people. I have to applaud the Kawartha Lakes–Haliburton group, who have been out through the summer taking this enumeration of homeless people.

But you know what the number one thing is? And I'm sure you're not going to be shocked on the government side to hear. The cost of hydro has tipped people into poverty and there is no way in the realm of their predicament that they can afford housing. They can't afford to pay their hydro bills. I have spoken many times—not only are my food banks up; I now have Fuel for Warmth, which is basically a heat bank, because people have no choice in my area. The number of people in poverty has increased immensely. Affordable housing lists of course go with that.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, there are so many important pieces of legislation we are debating, and this includes affordable housing. There are basic needs and there are basic dreams people have. One of them is, at one point, to own a home. It's a lifetime investment. People are finding it very difficult to fulfill those dreams.

I know life is much more expensive than when my generation started—finished school and started looking at their future and getting married and having a family, that kind of thing. But what is happening is—and this is not the first time I've heard this example—I've known a few people where the kids go to post-secondary education. They come out of that with, of course, a debt. They hopefully can find a good-paying job, because jobs are scarce in their field, where they can pay for their loans that they took out for school. So once they get that paid off, then they have to save for the down payment for a home. What has been happening with people that I know closely is that their kids are moving back home. They're staying with their parents for at least a year to save the down payment to buy a house. Living on their own, if they are renting an apartment or paying bills and buying groceries and all kinds of other expenses—insurance etc.—they can't afford enough savings to put away to buy that house. It might take years. People want to start their life. They want their independence from an apartment. So that is problematic.

Affordable housing is really important and the inclusionary zoning piece is essential. We can't leave it up to the private market to fill that need. I'm looking forward to further debate on this very important issue of affordable housing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has two minutes.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I want to thank the members from Kitchener–Waterloo, Scarborough–Agincourt, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock and London–Fanshawe for engaging in today's debate.

I think I want to address the member from Scarborough–Agincourt's comments first, because she said she takes exception to my comments during debate. Of course, everybody heard I referenced facts. She takes exception to facts. I know the member for Scarborough–Agincourt offered up opinions, and most Liberal members are very, very adept and effective at offering up opinions, but I recognize that there is a difference between opinion and fact.

Facts are what ought to drive public policy. Facts are what ought to drive debate, and not just opinions. If you think opinions are as valuable as facts, well, then you're in trouble. I think that's why Ontario is in trouble, because the Liberals do believe opinions are the same as facts, but they're not.

The basic wait times have increased substantially under the Liberal watch, from two and a half to four and a half years for seniors waiting to get affordable housing from 2004 to now, okay? They've doubled the wait time.

The median income to purchase a home—you now need near seven years of salary to meet the price of a median home in Toronto, up from 3.9 years in 2004. By any metric, by any measure, affordability in this province has gotten worse.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It being five to 6, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1755.

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