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(Hansard)**

Thursday 24 November 2016

Jeudi 24 novembre 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

Greffier
Todd Decker

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Thursday 24 November 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 24 novembre 2016

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PUTTING CONSUMERS FIRST ACT
(CONSUMER PROTECTION STATUTE
LAW AMENDMENT), 2016

LOI DE 2016 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ
AUX CONSOMMATEURS (MODIFIANT
DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR)

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

Bill 59, An Act to enact a new Act with respect to home inspections and to amend various Acts with respect to financial services and consumer protection / Projet de loi 59, Loi édictant une nouvelle loi concernant les inspections immobilières et modifiant diverses lois concernant les services financiers et la protection du consommateur.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate. The member from Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to rise today and speak to Bill 59, the Putting Consumers First Act. As a number of my colleagues have pointed out, this bill covers quite a bit of ground. I believe it touches on some very important issues and makes some strides in the right direction.

Let me start with the part of this bill that I hear about far too often in my constituency office. It's actually something that really upsets me: that people would take advantage of seniors. Madam Speaker, I speak about it often in this House. Our seniors deserve respect. They built the communities we love and they put in a lifetime of work so that we can have the lifestyle that we enjoy, yet far too often I get a call about seniors in my riding who have been locked into some scam of energy contracts by some energy company that refuses to remove the charges.

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I know everybody is interested in this and that's why they're listening.

Here is what happens: An energy company knocks on someone's door and asks to inspect their furnace. They

go in to inspect the furnace and they end up getting the resident to sign some form. More often than not, the seniors have no idea what they have signed.

In one of the worst examples of this, the company provided my office with a phone call tape of a senior verbally agreeing to an energy contract. Listen to this: In the audio file, the senior agrees to have an inspector come into their home and then eventually signs up with the energy contract. Madam Speaker, do you know what the problem is here? The senior has short-term memory loss. She's almost 90 years old, and her family is trying to assist her with both her physical and mental health challenges. The family told this to the energy company and yet we still had to intervene to get her bill looking normal. She had four separate energy companies on her bill that she was paying on what little assistance she was receiving from this government.

How can we let that happen in our communities across the province of Ontario? These door-to-door energy marketers take advantage of seniors. They take advantage for no reason other than greed. They know they're not providing a needed service to the people they prey on. Instead, they're just trying to make a quick buck by confusing people.

While I'm happy this bill will put some regulations on them, in my opinion, they should be banned outright. I'll repeat that: They should be banned outright. Let me say that again: In my opinion, this legislation should ban door-to-door energy marketers outright.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: How do you really feel about that?

Mr. Wayne Gates: I will try to get to that.

Let's protect our residents. Let's protect our seniors. Let's make sure that no one can walk up to their door and take advantage of them.

So what does this bill do? I think that's a fair question. Well, it stops door-to-door salespeople from entering residents into contracts where they can put liens on people's homes. Can you imagine that? That's going on today. We're seeing this with unsuspecting residents who are entering into contracts they don't need for equipment they can barely afford. Once they stop paying for it, they find out the company has put a lien on their house.

If that isn't terrible, I don't know what is. They worked their entire lives to pay for that home—in this case, 90 years old. A lot of 90-year-olds don't answer the door, but in this particular case, this 90-year-old answered her door, and look what has happened to her. It's been a nightmare, not only for her, who has physical challenges and mental challenges; the family had to get

involved. You just see how it spreads across the community, right across that family. It's absolutely terrible.

We've raised many, many questions in this Legislature about this practice. Just looking at it from the outside, you can see it doesn't make sense. I do appreciate this morning—I know it's early—that the other two parties are listening to this, because it could happen to your mom, your dad, your grandparents. It's not just happening in Niagara Falls. It's happening all over communities right across the province.

I just wish this bill would go further. Don't allow these companies to skirt the law by limiting the way they can take advantage of people. Find the companies that go door to door to take advantage of people and just ban them. Say, "You can't do it anymore. You're not allowed in the province of Ontario. We don't want you here. We don't want this in our communities."

There are hard-working men and women out there who are outside salespeople. They earn an honest living by selling an honest product. If the product breaks, there are return policies and cancellation clauses meant to protect consumers. Those are people we would like to protect. But fly-by-night energy companies or door-to-door energy companies that refuse to cancel unfair contracts: They're the ones that give a bad name to the others trying to make an honest living.

Madam Speaker, I get numerous calls every day in my office from concerned residents. They're telling me that people come up to the door and they have no idea if it's a scam or not. Sometimes they're very pushy at the door. I have asked my colleagues here, on both sides of the House: Have you ever had any come to your door? I have had them come to my door a number of times, and they actually are pushy. They try to do their sales pitch. If you don't listen to them or you don't let them inside the door, they get—

Interjection.

0910

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, I guess you can do that; you could slam the door shut. But they get ignorant; they get very, very pushy. And my—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: They're Liberals.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Percy said this; I didn't say this. I'm not going to take credit for this one: He said they're Liberals. It wasn't me. It wasn't me. I just want to clear that up.

They're telling me that people come to their door and they have no idea if it's a scam or not. Sometimes these people at the door are very pushy. I just explained that and had a little bit of an exchange with my colleagues in the Liberal party.

We need to help residents who fear this kind of business, and we can do it by strengthening this portion of the bill. Let's make sure, collectively, together—PCs, Liberals, it doesn't matter. We're talking about our families, our parents, our grandparents. Let's make sure residents in all our ridings don't get scammed again and that they're not afraid of opening their door when someone comes knocking.

Madam Speaker, there's another portion of this bill I would like to speak to, and that's regarding payday lending institutions. I think most of us would agree that most payday lending institutions unfairly prey against those with the lowest incomes in our community and some of the biggest needs. Think about that, because that's what's going on. I think most of us would agree that most payday lending institutions unfairly prey against those with the lowest income in our communities. I repeated that for a reason, because that's what's going on in our communities. When you come from the parts of Ontario that I do, that means a lot.

This is important, because we've been talking about this a lot this week. We've been talking about manufacturing jobs and why they're leaving the province. Some of it, we talked about hydro rates. Niagara has been hit hard over the last few decades. Manufacturing jobs which once provided tens of thousands of good lifestyles have left Niagara. They have left Oshawa. I know the representative from Oshawa is here. In my community of Niagara at one time, when I started in General Motors, we had 10,000 employees—10,000, Madam Speaker. Today, we have 1,600. That's a big loss for Niagara. They were all good-paying jobs. Not all union jobs—there was some management there—but there were good union jobs that paid benefits, had a pension. So they were able to have a family, they were able to raise their children, they were able to put them through school, give them a good education; that was all because of the manufacturing that was in our province.

I could talk about my good friend from Oshawa. Listen to this, it's amazing. It all stems from—this is how this happens. In Oshawa, we used to have 22,000 employees—22,000. Today, I believe there's somewhere around 2,500. Take a look at that job loss in that community, where those people probably got to retire, some of them—some of them got pensions. But here's what happens when you have job loss like that, in Oshawa, Niagara—General Motors pulled out of Windsor. They had a plant there where they had 8,000 people working; they closed that plant. What happens is, our young people lose their manufacturing jobs and then they have nowhere to go. I'll talk a little more on that as I go through this.

This is important to hear, because this is exactly what happened. When I was younger—*younger?* I know you're all thinking I'm pretty young now, but that's not completely accurate. When I was younger, you could walk out of high school—

Interjections.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Listen to this, because this is what happened to me. When I was younger, you could walk out of high school into a lifetime job that paid benefits, had a pension and gave you a good wage. That was the reality. In Niagara you could go to General Motors, which was a good-paying place. You could have gone to TRW. You could have gone to Hayes Dana. You could have gone to Welland and worked in the steel factories. There were all kinds of opportunities when I was a young guy. And General Motors was lucky enough that they hired me.

Now, a large part of that had to do with the fact that they were good union jobs, the same type of jobs that Patrick Brown was trying to get rid of when he was federally elected—but I'll leave that discussion for another day. Because it is early on a Thursday morning, I'm going to leave that for another day. But that's true.

Interjection: More: What do you really think?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Well, that's exactly what happened. He did attack us. There's no doubt about it.

Those jobs are gone now, and that left a lot of people facing hard times. I see my colleague from Niagara is here. I know I'm not supposed to mention his name, Jim Bradley. He knows about these hard times. Sometimes they managed to find a job—and I think this is important to listen to. Sometimes they managed to find a job at a lower rate of pay, without benefits or security. It breaks my heart, but sometimes they can't find work at all in Niagara—and not just Niagara, but right across the province of Ontario.

Madam Speaker—and I appreciate the fact that you're paying close attention to this—these are my neighbours and the people I am proud to represent. They're hard workers, they're smart and they're dedicated. They only need an opportunity to prove that. What do these people do to provide for their families? How do they pay for their hydro bill, which has skyrocketed? Sometimes to get the money, they feel they need to turn to a payday loan store. Think of how sad that is.

Some of the worst stories come out of these payday loan stores. You hear of interest rates in the triple digits. Can you imagine? You're desperate, you've got to provide for your family, whether it's your hydro bill, whether it's food, whether it's to put clothing on your back, and what do you do? You get tied into payday loans. Then you get tied into the interest rates, which are around 30%—some end up higher than 30%, but certainly close to 30%—with repayment plans that vulnerable workers will never be able to pay off. Think about that: You will never be able to pay off that loan you borrowed because the interest rates won't allow it to happen.

If a bank is charging somewhere between 10% and 15% interest, that is already a lot of extra money that people have to pay back. How is it fair, then, that we have these payday loan stores charging more than 300% interest? How could a family living on one minimum wage salary ever pay that off? I ask my colleagues. Maybe, when they get up and talk for two minutes on a hit, they can give me some advice on that, because I'm having lots of people come into my office. I know your cabinet people come into your office. How could a family living on one minimum wage salary ever pay that off? It's just terrible.

I'll answer that for everybody here this morning: Simply put, they can't. If there's no chance of it being paid off, it shouldn't be legal to give it out in the first place. I don't know how many of my colleagues would agree with that, but that's exactly what should happen.

The bill moves to set limits and regulate the repayment period. I want you to hear this, particularly the Liberal

Party: That, I can absolutely support. It also limits the products that these places can market so someone doesn't end up with a so-called cash card with a bunch of money they have no chance of being able to pay back.

There are two criticisms I have with this portion of the bill. First, a lot of what I'm seeing with these regulations is downloading onto municipalities, making it so our towns and our cities have the responsibility to curb this behaviour. The province can and should show real leadership on this issue. The province can and should take the lead to make sure that payday loan stores cannot make victims out of the honest, hard-working people of Ontario.

More importantly, this province needs to work to make sure we have far more opportunities for people to engage in meaningful and decent work. I think that's fair. I think that's reasonable. I think that's why we're here. I think that's why we're all here. We want to make sure our kids and our grandkids have the opportunity to work in their communities, be productive in their communities, volunteer in their communities. I think that's our job, quite frankly, but we've got to do a better job of it.

0920

How can we do that as MPPs? Well, how about a provincial auto strategy or investments in manufacturing? There are plans on the table this government can take advantage of today to create good jobs. Just take a project in my riding, the new Niagara Falls hospital: The plans are ready to go, the details are on the table, and the province just needs to move to get the shovels into the ground.

The province could move up the timeline on this hospital and put hundreds of local people to work in the next few years. These local workers would have a decent and steady paycheque, which they could put back into the community. When workers have a job that pays fairly and it's long-term, guess what they don't have to do? Does anybody know? I'll help you with that one: Workers wouldn't have to turn to payday loan centres if they had the opportunity for decent, honest and well-paying jobs. Now, does that make sense to everybody here?

If we could move up our hospital in Niagara—our unemployment rate is one of the highest in the province and has been for a while, even though we have the tourist sector in Niagara. Whether it's in Niagara-on-the-Lake—we've got some good stuff there, like the Fort Erie Race Track. There are lots of things happening in my riding, but if we had a hospital, that would put more people back to work.

The hospital was promised during my by-election, by the way. The Premier came in and said they were going to build a hospital in Niagara. That was almost three years ago. I don't think that's a fair or reasonable timeline. It's currently now at stage 1, with the papers for stage 2 being given to the government this month. But what I'm saying to the government and what I'm saying to the other elected reps from my riding is, why don't we have a discussion and move that time frame up? Why not put skilled trades back to work? Why not take a look and

say, “We’re going to use local workers. We’re going to have local companies, local businesses, whether big or small, to do the project”? Because the project is going to take three and a half to four years to build.

What do you get from that? You get good-paying jobs. You get young people into the trades through an apprenticeship. You get local business doing extremely well. What do you do? You get that person who is going to that payday loan every Friday, because they have no money to pay their hydro bill or buy their kids clothes or put food on the table. What do you do? You give them a job. That’s what we have to do in Ontario to get people back to work.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I’m pleased to be able to stand and make some comments about Bill 59, following on our friend across the way’s comments. I appreciate the passion that he brings to this. Just so that he knows, we are listening, and I am listening.

Speaker, just from a high level, I wanted to say that there are three areas that Bill 59 impacts, of course: door-to-door sales, which we’ve heard a lot about; home inspectors, which we’ve heard a lot about; and payday loans, which we’ve heard a lot about. I thought I would take a bit of my time just to comment on the door-to-door sales.

But I will say that what all three of those areas—door-to-door sales, home inspectors and payday loans—have in common is that they involve vulnerable consumers. You can clearly see that when we talk about door-to-door sales. You can clearly see that when we talk about payday loans. Maybe it’s a little bit of a bigger stretch on home inspectors, but not really, because when you’re buying a house, you are not an expert in buying houses, in home construction. We don’t know what needs to be looked at, and so we are really, as new homebuyers or as homebuyers, dependent upon what a home inspector has to tell us and their expertise.

I can tell you that from my perspective, Madam Speaker, there is nothing more despicable than someone who takes advantage of a vulnerable consumer, especially a senior or someone who is having financial difficulty. This is why I was pleased to see the government bringing in the Putting Consumers First Act, Bill 59, especially around door-to-door sales. Who among us hasn’t at some point been scammed? This will go a long way to making sure that that ends.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorne Coe: This act with respect to home inspections and to amend various acts with respect to financial services and consumer protection—there are a lot of aspects to this legislation that mirror what I have been hearing in my constituency office. I commend the member from Niagara Falls for raising certain aspects that he is experiencing as well.

Particularly in the area of home inspections, I am pleased that the government has taken some of the advice

onboard and begun integrating independent officer oversight. Also, they listened very carefully, in the case of my constituency, to the Durham real estate association, to move ahead with the home inspections aspect as well.

I’ve also had some experience with recently meeting with seniors’ organizations in my constituency concerning door-to-door sales. One of the aspects that we spoke about is some of the strengths of the legislation, but another area had to do with the duty to educate and reach out to consumers in the area, and the need to be more robust in that area. My hope would be that the minister and the ministry officials in this aspect of the legislation, dealing with door-to-door sales, do address that, and do that in a consultative way as well.

Last, on payday lending, I agree with some of the earlier points made by the member from Niagara Falls with respect to reducing problem consumers’ access to legal ways of obtaining the emergency cash, but also making sure, in this particular area as well, that payday lending be the last resort for consumers, particularly those who are already disadvantaged.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments? I recognize the member from Hamilton Mountain.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and good morning to you.

It’s a pleasure to stand in this House and to speak to Bill 59 and congratulate the member from Niagara Falls for his work that he put into his speaking notes today, because he raised some very valid issues, issues that I hear in my own community of Hamilton Mountain.

When we talk about payday loans and when we talk about the most vulnerable people in our society being attacked or being the focus of unscrupulous attention, these are some of the things that this bill does seek to rectify.

I do wish it went a little further, as the member from Niagara Falls had said also, because the payday loans are still at 390% interest annualization, which is completely unaffordable. It puts a person in a trap where they can’t get out because they’re always paying from their paycheque to pay the next loan date, and then they have to borrow again. Then they’re paying it back and then they’re borrowing again. They are in a hole and they are trying to dig their way out, but the dirt’s falling on their head because they just can’t possibly get out of that trap that they’re in.

Without really strong legislation and hard caps on the borrowed dollars, we’re going to continue to allow people to stay caught in that trap. It’s our most vulnerable population. People aren’t going there because it’s not necessary money that they need to be able to get through to the next payday. So, first of all, there have to be harder caps. I hope we can get that through in committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I certainly enjoyed the remarks of my colleague from Niagara Falls.

But first of all, Madam Speaker, I’ve got to give a plug: My daughter’s basketball team, grade 12, St.

Peter's from Peterborough, start their OFSAA tournament this afternoon. I want to thank my colleague Mr. Zimmer, who is going to cover my House duty this afternoon so I can be courtside at 4 p.m. to see my daughter play out in Scarborough.

Now, having given a plug for the Peterborough team, I want to get to Bill 59.

I want to thank the member. I recall vividly my last term on Peterborough city council, 2000 to 2003. Virtually every day I had seniors call me. These were seniors who had no family members in Peterborough, so they would phone their local councillor because they had these hucksters pounding on their door every day trying to get their foot in the door to sign up these seniors, particularly elderly women, that they were preying against. I think they had a list of where these people were residing. They would want them to sign up for water heaters, for air conditioners, and for this and every other thing. It was just awful, the way they played upon these individuals.

0930

I think the member summed it up very well. You know you have a good bill when our colleague the fine member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek—whom I respect highly—had this to say: “I commend the government ... for pushing this through, because this is long overdue, and I think it’s going to save a lot of anguish for a lot of people in our province.” I couldn’t say it any better than our good friend the very articulate member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

My colleague, whom I have great respect for, talked about the economy. I should share with this House that GE are building a brand new plant in Welland, Ontario, because our business climate is much better in Ontario. They’re moving that plant from Wisconsin and they’re going to establish it in Welland. They’ll be hiring tool-makers and machinists, the kind of good jobs that my friend from Niagara Falls—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. I will return to the member from Niagara Falls to wrap up.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you very much. I appreciate all of the comments from my colleagues, particularly the last comment about good-paying jobs in the province of Ontario. We don’t need them just in Welland; we need them in St. Catharines; we need them in Niagara Falls; we need them in Oshawa; we need them in Windsor; we need them in Timmins; we need them in Hamilton.

All I’m saying is, I’m complimenting you on the fact that GE is coming to Niagara. It’s a good thing. We need more manufacturing in the province of Ontario. In my humble opinion, the reason why we ran into the manufacturing crisis in the province of Ontario and across Canada was because of NAFTA and some of the trade agreements that were put in place that really killed the manufacturing sector in the province of Ontario. Our artificially high dollar was another reason that we ran into problems in manufacturing, when we had a dollar that was worth \$1.10 when it should be around 80 cents to 84 cents. Governments chose to make sure our dollar

was artificially high through one sector of the economy, which was oil. It drove our dollar to unreasonable prices.

So what happened in the province of Ontario in particular, because we were hit the hardest—Quebec was hit hard, by the way, as well—was that manufacturers left this country. Our dollar is now back down to 74 cents or 75 cents. Manufacturers are starting to come out. What we have to do is make sure that they don’t stay out of Ontario because of high hydro rates. We’ve got to fix that. We’ve been talking about that for a long time.

I’m going to say to the government—I don’t like giving you a lot of advice, because what happens is, that’s our problem: You guys take a lot of our issues—you have to stop the sale of hydro. You sold 30%. You probably can’t get out of it. Stop it; stop it and don’t go any further.

To the Conservatives, who want to sell 100% of it: Don’t go down that road ever again. It’s an asset that is making money for infrastructure. It’s an asset that’s making money for our publicly funded education system. It’s an asset that’s making money for our hospitals.

I will talk on the bill another time. Please don’t cut debate off on this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I’m now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have 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.

I recognize the President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Liz Sandals: We wish to continue debate. But, Madam Speaker, before we do that I believe you will find we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding Bills 7 and 45, which are currently in committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Do we agree? Agreed.

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Liz Sandals: I move that, with respect to Bill 7, An Act to amend or repeal various Acts with respect to housing and planning, the Standing Committee on Social Policy be authorized to meet on Monday, November 28, 2016, from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings; and

That the deadline for requests to appear be Friday, November 25, 2016, at 5 p.m.; and

That the deadline for amendments to be filed with the Clerk of the Committee be Wednesday, November 30, 2016, at 5 p.m.; and

That the Standing Committee on Social Policy meet on Monday, December 5, 2016, from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 7; and

That on December 5, 2016, at 4 p.m. those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved and the Chair of the Committee shall

interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of Bill 7 and any amendments thereto. At this time, the Chair shall allow one 20-minute waiting period pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report Bill 7 to the House no later than Tuesday, December 6, 2016; and

That in the event that the committee fails to report Bill 7 on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such time the bill shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day; and

That, when the order for third reading of Bill 7 is called, an afternoon or up to three hours of debate, whichever comes first, shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

The vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on Bill 7, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes; and

With respect to Bill 45, An Act to amend certain Acts with respect to provincial elections, that the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet on Monday, November 28, 2016, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and

That the deadline for amendments to be filed with the Clerk of the Committee be Wednesday, November 30, 2016, at 5 p.m.; and

That the Standing Committee on General Government be authorized to meet on Monday, December 5, 2016, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 45; and

That at 4 p.m. on December 5, 2016, those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the Committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of Bill 45 and any amendments thereto. At this time, the Chair shall allow one 20-minute waiting period pursuant to standing order 129(a);

That the committee shall report Bill 45 to the House no later than Tuesday, December 6, 2016; and

That in the event that the committee fails to report Bill 45 on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That, upon receiving the report of the Standing Committee on General Government, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith, and at such

time Bill 45 shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day; and

That, when the order for third reading of Bill 45 is called, an afternoon or up to three hours of debate, whichever comes first, shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, apportioned equally among the recognized parties. At the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of Bill 45 without further debate or amendment; and

The vote on third reading may be deferred pursuant to standing order 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on Bill 45, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Ms. Sandals has moved—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Dispense? Agreed? Okay.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PUTTING CONSUMERS FIRST ACT
(CONSUMER PROTECTION STATUTE
LAW AMENDMENT), 2016

LOI DE 2016 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ
AUX CONSOMMATEURS (MODIFIANT
DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Han Dong: I'll be sharing my time with the member from St. Catharines and the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.

I'm very pleased to be able to speak to this bill because consumer protection, in my view, is a very important aspect of our government. I want to read to the House some of the record that we've accomplished since 2003. Our government has worked hard to address consumer protection issues through legislation which includes home and condominium purchases—Tarion review and Protecting Condominium Owners Act, 2015; repairs to and purchase of cars—new regulation as of July 2016 under the Repair and Storage Liens Act and all-in pricing under the Ontario Motor Vehicle Dealers Act, 2010; wireless services—Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2013; door-to-door sales—Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act, 2013; burial, cremation and funeral arrangements—establishment of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario; travel agents—the Ontario Travel Industry Act, 2010; and gift cards—banning the expiry of gift cards.

0940

In 2015 alone, we took action against companies and individuals taking advantage of consumers by mediating almost \$300,000 in refunds to consumers through cancel-

lation of contracts; providing help and advice in respect of almost 30,000 complaints; conducting almost 400 inspections; and delivering 77 outreach and education presentations across Ontario.

In Ontario, we have a department called the consumer protection branch under the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services. I know they do great work. They go out there and investigate the complaints that are given to them by consumers and find out the rare incidents of violations of the Consumer Protection Act. They can go as far as prosecuting those in court. I'm very proud of the government's achievement on that.

This bill is a very important bill. It includes three aspects: banning door-to-door sales, regulating the home inspection industry and strengthening consumer financial protections in the payday loan industry. But the one that's of particular interest to me is the home inspection aspect of it. Our government is proposing to establish mandatory licensing for home inspectors in Ontario. A self-funded administrative authority would also be created to oversee and enforce the proposed legislation and any associated regulations. A licensing regime would assure consumers that they are hiring a qualified professional.

This is very important, not just to the consumers but actually to the industry. As you know, I put forward my private member's bill earlier this year to speak to this matter. I'm very pleased that the majority of my private member's bill was adopted by the government's bill. I've had conversations with the Ontario Association of Certified Home Inspectors and also associations such as the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors. In fact, I've gone to the AGM of the Ontario Association of Certified Home Inspectors and had a chance to speak to a lot of home inspectors. They're certified as inspectors by the association.

I want to take this opportunity to thank these two organizations and a few other organizations in the industry for holding the standard for home inspections. What I hear is that they're competing with individuals who will call themselves home inspectors but charge maybe a quarter of what they charge in the market. They just fly by, give people a certificate and say, "You're good to go." What happens is, the new homeowners—who can really use that service and don't have much experience in investigating the state of repair of their new home—will be hurt in that situation, because they don't have the full information.

I remember when I purchased my house, I got a home inspection, because back then, not too long ago, it was the norm. When you purchase a new home, you want to go through a home inspection to find out whether the joists and the foundation are in good shape. I, along with my wife, were new homeowners. We had no experience. So we went out there and got ourselves a home inspector.

It was actually a very good experience. I learned quite a bit about the house we were about to call our home. I still remember that he gave us a walk-around and told us about the bricks and how to maintain them. It was a really valuable service.

But nowadays—I've seen some stats—less than 60% of transactions involve a home inspection. This is really concerning to me because we've seen the hype in the real estate market. We know many people are going to own a home and are going through that stage. A lot of them are newcomers to our province, and they're not very familiar with the structure, the way the homes are built. If they waive home inspection, they're taking a tremendous risk.

When I talked to the home inspectors in the industry, I've heard that they're calling for a delegated ministry authority, a regulatory body that will establish a code of ethics. Also, it will enforce, it will license this code of ethics. They're holding a standard in the industry, so homeowners can be assured, when they hire a home inspector, that they're regulated and certified.

Another important aspect of it: If there is, in the future, some dispute, unfortunately, about the service they purchased, there is a place they can go to voice their complaint. There will be a regulatory body to investigate these complaints to see whether or not proper standards were followed. This is very important, and it's more cost-effective to deal with these disputes.

A regulatory body will also act to collect data, to collect centralized information and then update the professionals in the industry periodically with renewed information. We know technology, high tech, is used in the home-building industry, and more and more new techniques are used in renovation and so on and so forth. This information must be shared with home inspectors so they can conduct a very effective inspection.

On the consumer side, now they can look at home inspectors as someone who can give them a piece of advice before major renovation projects. If you look around the province, some of the renovation projects are in upwards of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Now they can hire a home inspector to come in and tell them, "You've got to double up the joists, you've got to look into the foundation, you have a piping problem, you've got to properly insulate the pipes so they won't burst in the wintertime."

I had that incident happen to me in my home last winter. As you remember, Madam Speaker, last winter was a very cold winter. One of my water pipes was too close to the outside wall and it wasn't properly insulated. I'd just had a renovation done a couple of years ago, and that pipe, I remember, was new. Had I had a good home inspector, who could come to my house and give me advice before these reno projects, I could have avoided that problem.

I think this is a very valuable service, something that we ought to have in Ontario—regulated so that consumers can have peace of mind when they purchase it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the remarks given this morning by the member for Trinity-Spadina on this bill, Bill 59, Putting Consumers First Act. I want to thank our whip of the day, the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka, for giving me this opportunity to respond to this speech this morning.

It's always a privilege and an honour to have the chance to speak in the Legislature.

I'm aware that this bill, of course, is intended to be a consumer protection bill. For our part as the official opposition, we're supportive of consumer protection legislation as long as it makes sense and as long as it doesn't make it extremely difficult for businesses to do their business and to be profitable in the province of Ontario. I think it's important that we ensure that companies want to be here, first of all, and want to expand their businesses, and in order to do that, they have to be profitable. They have to be able to make money. If they're going to be able to invest in new equipment, expand their operations, hire more people or give their existing employees raises, they have to be profitable. I think that sometimes needs to be pointed out, because I think the current government sometimes forgets that.

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This legislation, of course, pertains to home inspections. We know that the home inspection profession is relied upon by many consumers before making perhaps the largest purchase in their whole lives. If they buy their home, that might be their most significant investment, of course. In many cases, that is people's most significant investment that they will ever make.

Currently, there are no province-wide professional standards for home inspectors or recourse for a consumer whose home is revealed to be in need of major work following the purchase. We are aware that the government commissioned a consultation on home inspections that recommended licensing the profession. I know the member for Trinity–Spadina talked about that in his remarks.

I think there is consensus in the Legislature that this bill needs to move forward for further discussion. We do have some concerns as an official opposition, so we would like to ensure that there are adequate public hearings to discuss those concerns. I look forward to further debate on this matter.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Windsor–Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good morning, Speaker. It's always a pleasure to stand in the House and comment on my good friend from Trinity–Spadina. I complimented him in the House before, when he brought in a private member's bill on licensing and regulating home inspectors, because I was working on a similar bill at the same time. I was talking to Mike Holmes. I wanted to bring Mike Holmes in. He beat me to the pass, he really did, so I'm really pleased that it's in this bill.

One aspect of the bill that we really didn't get into at this time was the payday loan. He didn't get into the payday loan aspect of the bill. I mention that because I know so many people have to borrow money these days. One of the reasons they have to borrow money is to pay their hydro bill. Speaker, if the Liberal government, if Premier Wynne is serious about correcting some of the mistakes on the hydro file, the very next step she should take is getting rid of the peak-hour pricing. We have to get rid of

peak-hour pricing in Ontario. We can no longer say to people, "Get up at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and do your dishes or wash your clothes." That is unreasonable. It has to go.

I met with dairy farmers. For some reason, their cows won't listen when they say, "We have to milk you but we can't milk you in peak hours." Cows want to be milked in peak time. We have got to get rid of the peak-hour pricing in hydro, or else we've got to get the Liberals to go talk to the cows. The cows won't listen to them. The people in Ontario aren't listening to them; why would the cows?

Get rid of peak-hour pricing. It shouldn't be there. It's like smart meters that weren't so smart. Cows are smarter than us; they know when they have to be milked. Get rid of peak-hour pricing in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. James J. Bradley: This is a piece of legislation, which the member spoke to, that I have been waiting for a long period of time. My colleagues who have held the position of consumer minister in this province have been harassed by me, I have to say, for not bringing forward legislation years ago, but we recognize that there's always a time and place for such legislation. I agree with the three components of it.

First of all, home inspections are very important for both the seller and for the buyer, but particularly the buyer—to know what you are getting when you're purchasing a home, which is probably the major purchase that anybody is going to make in a lifetime. You want to ensure that you're getting a home that is appropriate for your needs and you know what you're getting.

The second is the payday loans. I'm absolutely amazed at the number of these payday loan places I see all over our communities, which indicates there must be a lot of people using them. I would like to see the banks and the credit unions—and the credit unions have moved in this direction—trying to make loans available to people so they don't have to go to the loan sharks—sorry, loan offices—that we see around the province called payday loans, with all the attractive signs they have on them to lure people in.

The last is the door-to-door, and many people have talked about it. We're not saying that nobody can go door to door at any time, but there have been individuals who have bullied senior citizens, particularly, who grew up in a generation when you trusted people who came to the door. Every time governments, whether it's municipal, the provincial government or the federal government, try to do something to stop it, they manoeuvre in a different direction.

I think this is very timely legislation. I'm glad to see that there's unanimous support in this House for this particular bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have a moment or two to speak to Bill 59, An Act to enact a new Act with

respect to home inspections and to amend various Acts with respect to financial services and consumer protection, and comment on the speech made by the member from Trinity–Spadina.

I was going to focus briefly on the home inspections aspect of the bill to begin with. He talked about his experience with some fly-by-night home inspectors, ones who weren't necessarily fully qualified or were just giving a certificate for a home inspection. That certainly would be a real concern. Purchasing a home is the biggest purchase most people make. Those problems can be a real challenge for families.

My experience with home inspectors has been that in the few purchases I've made, buying a home has been very positive. In fact, back in 2005, when we bought a new home, the home inspector inspected it and he actually missed the fact that there was a crack in the oil furnace. When I got the mechanical people, Muskoka Mechanical, to come by and look at the furnace, they said we needed a new furnace. We advised the home inspector and he, on his own, offered to cover half the cost of the furnace. So that was a very positive experience, but not necessarily the norm.

It's worth noting that the home inspectors are in favour of licensing home inspectors. Also, the other main focus involved in the business, the real estate salespeople and the real estate industry, is in favour of home inspection.

I hope the government draws on the knowledge of the Ontario Association of Home Inspectors, who have had experience and expertise in this field, and doesn't create unnecessary red tape in the process of licensing home inspectors. But generally, I support this and our party supports this as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Trinity–Spadina to wrap up.

Mr. Han Dong: I want to thank the member from Wellington–Halton Hills, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, the member from St. Catharines and the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for their response to my earlier remarks.

Again, this is a very important bill. I heard the member from Wellington–Halton Hills mention public hearings. In fact, the government has done extensive consultation in the preparation of these bills. I remember speaking to the Ontario Association of Certified Home Inspectors. They were on the panel that was put together by the previous minister to provide a report, which the government used as the basis of a portion of this bill. There has been wide consultation with the industry, with the insurance industry, with the realtor industry, as well as the consumer protection industry.

Going forward, if passed, this bill—as you know, it will go to third reading, go to committee. There will be a public input opportunity. As well, in the regulation development stage, there will be tons of opportunities for public input. I have no doubt that this bill and the regulations, by the time it comes to enforcement, will be a very balanced bill, making sure that consumer rights will be protected.

I'm also very pleased that the definition of “home” in this bill will be defined to include vertical communities, which many condos in my riding will benefit from.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?
1000

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 59, the consumer protection act. We're hearing a lot of support from all sides of the House. We're talking today about payday loans, door-to-door sales and licensing of home inspectors, as most of us know. I think that what it comes down to, though, is how to better educate the public, how to have the public understand that, yes, there are regulations in place, but they also have to be very aware of their rights. Be even aware of the new regulations taking place, because too often, we see that there are rules in place and the public is not even aware that they can say no to something, or that they can purchase something and in many cases they have 30 days to change their mind.

I want to start by talking about payday loans. We see them mostly in rural communities. We don't see too many in, say, the downtown core. As we get further away where people are struggling—people are really struggling, living paycheque to paycheque. In rural communities specifically, I want to give one example, which is that people rely on their cars. If you're in a rural community, very often there is no public transit. I think it's very hard for people in downtown Toronto to even comprehend that. Oftentimes there is no public transit. There may not even be taxi services, certainly not Uber and things like that.

If somebody has a sudden car repair—even if it's just a nail in a tire—if they don't have the money in the bank to take care of that, if they don't have a credit card to purchase the new tire and get the repair done, they're not able to get to work. So, yes, they will go to a payday loan and borrow, even if the interest is exorbitant.

We've heard talk about 18% interest for a payday loan, but that's 18% a month. That's not 18% a year. That can be something close to 400% a year. These people just need access to what oftentimes we refer to as microloans, just a very small amount of money that they need access to. We can make it tough for people to get payday loans or we can make it difficult for payday loan institutions to operate, but the crux of the matter is that, oftentimes, people need these small loans to carry on with their lives so that they can get to work and even to go buy groceries.

I think that sometimes we're sort of missing the point of the whole issue, which isn't just the payday loan institutions themselves—definitely, we need to have proper regulations in place and make sure that people aren't being unfairly taken advantage of and that they're able to get out of this debt situation that they find themselves in. But also look at why people are in such dire straits in the first place. It could be because their hydro bills are exorbitant—that they were managing quite well until a few years ago and now they're getting behind on their hydro bills, and perhaps are going to a payday loan just to pay their hydro bill.

What kind of example are we setting here in the Legislature? I want to remind everybody that we're spending a billion dollars a month in interest on the provincial debt. People at home sit and understand that, and say, "Well, the province seems to keep running." The lights are on here in the Legislature. Somehow we're managing to carry on and have heat—well, because we're borrowing.

People are living in municipalities that have huge debt. We have regional governments that have added debt. It's not just about financial literacy for the masses. I think it's also about setting an example here in the Legislature to start showing people how to manage money properly.

We have families who are struggling and have medical emergencies that they see aren't covered, or they have to travel for some health care. They don't have the money in the bank. They don't have that rainy day fund. Let's do what we can do here in the Legislature to understand the scope of why people are using these institutions.

Next on the list are door-to-door sales. We have to understand that it's not just at people's doors that they're sometimes being taken advantage of. We see fraud out in workplaces, in other parts of the community and online, which is very difficult for legislators and regulators to combat.

Again, we want to ensure that people are protected. We do understand that many times people are at home and somebody could come to the door and that person really isn't in a capacity to understand what they're signing. The family that's living with them knows that they're not in fantastic shape, but they don't want to insult them, they don't want to fight with them and they don't want to take away their liberties. But they do want to protect the individuals at the house. Many times, these are seniors who are being targeted, as we've heard today in the Legislature. We don't want to say to the seniors living with family members, "You know what? You don't ever have the right to ever sign for anything."

We do need those protections in place. It does make us all nervous to hear that people are answering the door to complete strangers, just because they have a clipboard and a vest on. I would advise people at home to consider getting—there are the little camera units that use WiFi. They're not very expensive to install. I think they even have them now at Costco. And warn family members: If you don't know who's at the door, don't answer. There are doorbells now that go to phones. That all can be great protection in our communities.

Again, we can't protect everybody from everything. What can we do to ensure that the public is better able to take care of themselves?

Licensing home inspectors: I think most of us here have purchased a house. I know that my best home inspectors were my father and my father-in-law. My father was an engineer. My father-in-law worked with construction equipment. You can't pay people to care, but you certainly can make sure that they're licensed and understand the rules, and make sure that they're doing what they need to do.

I don't know if home inspection can start to be more of a trade, where we actually have programs that people can take to be a licensed home inspector. I'm not positive that that's going to be part of it, but I think it should be, Madam Speaker—that there are courses that people can take to become a home inspector and have the necessary skills.

I haven't really heard it mentioned here, but what I would like to see in home inspection is that home inspectors have to at least take pictures to show that they were in the attic, that they looked where they had to. Some insurance companies do that for homes: When they assess your home for insurance, they take pictures so that afterwards, you have sort of a booklet. I have that of my home from one company. I was kind of surprised that they came and they took actual pictures of each of the rooms so that they had the best record possible of what was in the house and the types of materials, appliances, furniture and what have you.

We have also heard a little bit this week on a different bill—but I think it relates—about points cards and things like that. Part of it is that people now have credit cards—many years ago, when we were children, you didn't see teenagers with credit cards. But now we see kids with credit cards, and they're racking up that credit card debt.

It's so easy to get a credit card. There was even an article this week where there were employees in supermarkets saying that they're just doing a survey or signing people up for points cards, and it turned out that actually what they were doing was they were signing to order a credit card. It's become so easy to get those credit cards, and so easy for people to see it as easy access to money that they might not have had if they didn't have a credit card. People have multiple credit cards, and we hear stories of people getting credit cards just to pay the debt on the other credit cards. Well, we know that eventually that catches up with people and they find themselves in difficult situations.

I would advise anybody who is watching at home that if you have credit card debt and you're struggling and you're paying high interest, even if you're managing to pay the minimum on your card, go to a bank, sit down with a financial planner, get a proper loan or credit line and pay off your credit card debt. A bank loan is far less interest than credit card interest. Don't be embarrassed; a lot of people in the community sometimes find themselves in a difficult situation, and they make the situation worse just because they're afraid to come and talk to somebody. Even your MPP: Our constituency offices are there and we're happy to refer you to services. There are government plans, even, to help pay for hydro bills for low-income earners and things like that.

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for giving us the time to debate this this morning.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Seeing it's almost 10:15, I will be recessing the House until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1009 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to welcome all the guests here today from the inaugural cohort of CJPAC, the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee Women in Politics Mentorship Program. They're spending the day at Queen's Park. We're going to have a tour and lunch, and they're going to be here for question period and statements.

I just want to read out the names: Andrea Adler Milavsky, Brianna Ames, Georganne Burke—whom I know very well; Georganne's here—Sarah Charrow, Julie Dabrusin, Nikki Holland, Yael Kogan, Miriam Kramer, Tamara Kronis, Melissa Lantsman, Sharon Laredo, Rachel Levy Sarfin, Adria Minsky, Dani Peters—who's organizing it, by the way—Nicole Silverberg, Jordana Skurka, Marni Tolensky, Jaime Reich, Rachel Chertkoff and Sherry Firestone. Welcome, ladies.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'd like to introduce Christina Doucette, up in the Speaker's gallery this morning. She's from the riding of Pickering—Scarborough East. She has been helping out in the const office and she's going on my payroll on January 1. Thank you.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'd like to welcome Randy Nickle and his wife, Laurie, who are from Kenora—Rainy River and who are down here for the Grey Cup.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: In the members' east gallery: my friend from Cambridge, John Holman, part of the Cambridge firefighters. Thank you, John, for joining us.

Mr. James J. Bradley: The guest of page captain Kaitlyn Spaan is her father, Allan Spaan, who is in the members' gallery to the east. Elizabeth Spaan, her mother, was unable to be with us today but is watching and is with us in spirit.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'm pleased to welcome Mrs. Angela Schwarz from Midhurst to the Legislature today. Mrs. Schwarz is here representing the United Church of Canada as part of their Bread Not Stones campaign to end child poverty. I look forward to meeting Angela.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Speaker, I'll let you do one of these introductions, but I will introduce the people who are here with that individual. I'm delighted to welcome to the Ontario Legislature three students from Wilfrid Laurier University. They are: Stephanie Bellotto, Veronica Swiech and Ernesto Smiley. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to welcome representatives from the Ontario Home Builders' Association, including their new president, Neil Rodgers, to Queen's Park this morning. I want to thank them for the great breakfast they served this morning.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's a pleasure to welcome the wonderful grade 5 students from Bowmore Public School, their teacher, Ms. Johnston, and parents Ivan Langrish and Elizabeth Grendon. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce Kennisha Taylor, who is volunteering in my office. Thank you very much, Kennisha.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I would like to add my welcome to the Canadian Jewish Political

Affairs Committee. The CJPAC Women in Politics Mentorship Program is having its launch with MPPs at Queen's Park today. Here today with us are Jaime Reich, Brianna Ames, Sharon Laredo, Jordana Skurka, Marni Tolensky, Sarah Charrow, Miriam Kramer, Tamara Kronis and Andrea Adler Milavsky. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Chris Ballard: In recognition of National Child Day, I would like to welcome the 16 delegates from Bread Not Stones, the United Church of Canada campaign to end child poverty.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to introduce John Meinen, who is here with the Home Builders' Association. He'll be here shortly.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to welcome my good friend Pierre Dufresne, who's the vice-president of Tartan Homes from Ottawa, who is visiting, along with the ever-famous Joe Vaccaro from the Ontario Home Builders' Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Chris Ballard: Last but not least, I'd like to welcome Neil Rodgers, president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association, to the House today.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Another introduction, Speaker: I also noticed a good friend of mine, Rachel Chertkoff from CJPAC, is at Queen's Park. It's always good to see Rachel, with other friends who are visiting. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I want to introduce a constituent of mine, Neil Rodgers, also with Tribute homes. Thank you, Neil. It's great to see you here.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: This is a special introduction because the guests are not here right now, but I'm sure that the Ottawa Redblacks will be visiting Queen's Park as the Grey Cup champions when they clinch the cup this Sunday, right here in Toronto, against the Calgary Stampeders. Go Redblacks, go!

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We also have a Speakers' choice: the former member from Kitchener Centre in the 38th, 39th and 40th Parliaments, Mr. John Milloy. Welcome, John. Thank you for being here.

I also have the honour of welcoming—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sure you want to hear this one. I also have the honour of welcoming a great Ontarian and a great Canadian to Queen's Park this morning. In the Speaker's gallery is the former federal member of Parliament for York West, and at the same time, a great NHL hockey legend, Mr. Leonard "Red" Kelly. With him is his wife, Andra Kelly, and their daughter Casey Kelly and her husband, James Waddell.

We welcome all of the guests to Queen's Park. Thank you for being here.

We have a reception set up to meet and to discuss very intelligent things about hockey with Mr. Kelly in room 340 after question period. We welcome you all to this reception to chew the fat with a great Canadian.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: If it's not too late to sneak in an introduction, Ivan Langrish is coming here. He used to work for me. He is now here as a volunteer with his

daughter Charlotte's grade 5 class from Bowmore Road public school.

DOLLS OF HOPE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the Minister of Housing and poverty reduction.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I believe you'll find that we have unanimous consent that members be permitted to display on their desks today a Doll of Hope to bring recognition to child poverty in Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I introduce the unanimous consent, I've looked into the situation and I would ask members, as a courtesy, that these dolls, because of their size, not be used as props in any way, shape or form, and that they are displayed on the desk and appropriately used for their full intention. I'm hoping that members will abide by that request.

The Minister of Housing is seeking unanimous consent to display the dolls for anti-poverty. Do we agree? Agreed.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Grandview Children's Centre offers amazing programs for children in Durham region. The centre is life-changing for many children and their families. So when I heard there are 2,500 children on the wait-list, I was shocked.

Grandview is in desperate need of an upgraded facility, but this government continues to do nothing and backs away.

There are 970 children with autism who are waiting for ABA services, and the average wait time at Grandview is 521 days before beginning treatment. The government has an opportunity to make a difference. Actually, the Liberal MPPs from Durham have written the Premier pleading for investment here.

My question to the Premier is, will the Premier commit today to listen to her own members, listen to the Grandview Children's Centre and get shovels into the ground to help these children with autism? Because it's the right thing to do.

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to thank the member for the question and also the members on this side who have been advocating for this facility renewal.

Applause.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you.

The member opposite has brought up the issue around autism here in the province of Ontario. The member knows very well that this government has invested—will invest—half a billion dollars of additional funding to

autism here in Ontario, which is the most historic investment into autism, not only here in Ontario but right across this country, and probably North America as a whole. So we're very proud of the fact that we were able to make investments in our children in the province of Ontario. This investment is historic and it will make a huge difference in the system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier—and hopefully I can get an answer from the Premier. It's one thing for the minister to say that they're making it a priority, but not to answer the question about Grandview—there are almost 1,000 kids on the wait-list waiting for ABA therapy. There is a wait-list of 521 days per child. It's one thing to say you're going to make this a priority, but we're not seeing shovels in the ground. We're not seeing commitments of actual dollars to these important projects.

It's not just Grandview in Durham. Look at Yes I Can nursery in Don Valley West. Yes I Can is going to have to close its doors and Ontario could lose another 130 precious child care spaces. It's not too late to save Yes I Can Nursery. This government has the opportunity to do the right thing, whether it's in Oshawa with Grandview or whether it's at Yes I Can in the Premier's own riding.

I'm asking the Premier directly: Will you provide the funding for these centres so children with autism can have the help they need? Yes or no to Grandview? Yes or no to Yes I Can?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to talk about capital investment into our children's treatment centres here in the province of Ontario. Since 2008-09, this government has invested over \$300 million into capital investments in our children's treatment centres. When the member opposite, the Leader of the Opposition, is talking about autism and program investment, again, we're talking about a half-a-billion-dollar investment into autism here in the province of Ontario. This is unprecedented. No government in the history of this province has done anything like this government, and we're very proud of our record.

In addition to that, that half-a-billion-dollar investment will create 16,000 new spaces across the province of Ontario, and we're aiming to reduce wait times so it's six months or less. We are going to create more diagnostic hubs across the province, and we're going to make sure that our children here in the province of Ontario have what they need to be successful.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier—and for a third time I'm going to ask the Premier to address this. The government has taken families of children with autism to court. They've kicked thousands of children off the IBI treatment wait-list. They refuse to build the much-needed and desperately needed expansion at the Grandview Children's Centre in Oshawa. Soon enough, this government will be forced to close Yes I Can Nursery in the Premier's own riding, desperately taking away a service for those children that need it.

This government's attack on children with autism and their families must stop. This has been continuous. This

has been unrelenting. The Liberals can't take back their lawsuits, but they have an opportunity for these two centres, with Yes I Can and Grandview, to actually offer support.

So rather than government talking points of what they might have done 10 years ago or 20 years ago, or what Premier Hepburn might have done, I'm going to ask a question to the Premier: Will you fund Grandview? Will you fund Yes I Can? Yes or no? Don't pass the buck. Please answer the question.

Hon. Michael Coteau: We're not talking about 10 years ago or 20 years ago; we're talking about today. There's a big difference between this government and what the opposition has brought forward. We're bringing half a billion dollars of new investment into autism.

He's talking about two separate things: On one side, he's talking about services; and then, on the other side, he's talking about capital investment. We've made over \$300 million in the last several years of new investment, capital investment into those facilities—a half a billion dollars into services for autism. The member opposite knows that this government has done more for autism than any government before.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Since I can't get an answer on their commitment to children with autism, let's talk about hydro.

Last weekend, the Premier acknowledged the hydro crisis was her mistake, a mistake she apparently never saw coming. But as CBC's Robyn Urback put it, "Aside from the repeated, incessant warnings—there was no warning." She also added, "Besides the dozens of reports, years of increasing consumer prices, dire financial warnings and protests over unaffordable hydro bills—there was no way they could have seen this coming."

So when did the Premier realize she had made a mistake? Was it when she learned people couldn't afford to pay for the bills to have food on the table? Was it when she realized that seniors were living in energy poverty? When did the Premier realize she made a mistake? And, for the fourth time, will the Premier answer the question?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows that we have worked for some time to reduce costs, whether it's taking the debt retirement charge off people's bills, whether it's putting the Ontario energy support program in place, whether it's renegotiating the Samsung deal which takes billions of dollars out of the system, or whether it's making a decision not to go ahead with new nuclear build, which they actually oppose. So we have made a number of changes.

What I have said is that the mess that we had to clean up when we came into office under the previous Premier, the mess that has been left by the previous government—the electricity system was in disarray. There had not been the investments that there needed to be made. There had not been decision-making.

As far back as the NDP government, where there could have been deals with Manitoba that actually would have bent the cost curve—those decision where not made. We had to clean up a mess. We cleaned it up, and there's a cost associated with it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: I thought the Premier acknowledged responsibility. She admitted a mistake, and now she's back to blaming everyone except for her government when every report, all the evidence, suggests it's because of their mistake. Admitting a mistake is the first step.

But this admission is too little, too late. Just ask the people of Owen Sound, whose mayor calls their latest hydro bill "ridiculous."

For 13 street light accounts, the city consumed \$442 in electricity in a one-month period. However, the total bill was—hear this—over \$10,000: nearly \$5,000 for delivery fees and over \$4,000 to pay for the Liberals' mysterious global adjustment fee.

I agree with the mayor of Owen Sound: That is ridiculous. How can the Premier justify a bill like that—\$10,000 when only \$442 was used? It's ridiculous.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In my first answer I talked about the changes that we have made. I talked about the reality that we had a mess that had to be cleaned up, which we have done.

I say now, as I said on the weekend, that there is more that we need to do, and I take responsibility that we have to focus on people's day-to-day costs. I understand that. I also understand that the changes that we have made, the cleaning up of the system and making the system reliable had a cost associated with them. We know there's more that needs to be done.

On the issue of municipalities: I understand that there are some municipalities that may be speaking to the opposition, but the reality is that on that front as well, we have been working to undo a burden that was put on municipalities by the previous government. We have been taking costs off the property tax bills of municipalities, and we've been doing that because we believe that municipalities needed more room to be able to deliver services—to the tune of \$3 billion that we've taken off those property taxes.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Again to the Premier: How is it an apology when you continue to blame others and take no responsibility?

1050

Global News shared a story about a Kingston, Ontario couple and their struggles paying their skyrocketing bills because of the Liberal hydro crisis. The family had been without electricity since August, when Hydro One cut off their power for not paying their bill. Then a generous donor in the neighbourhood paid off that bill. They now have their lights on for the first time in a few months. But it shouldn't take the generosity of a donation from a kind neighbour.

Too many Ontarians are in this predicament. Sadly, the government just doesn't seem to care. Will the Premier finally show some compassion, not allowing neighbours to take care of someone that can't afford their hydro bill—I want not a band-aid solution, Mr. Speaker; I want a real solution. I don't want to hear about a PST rebate that doesn't even cover the clean energy rebate. Will we have real, meaningful changes—

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: —not band-aid solutions? People can't—

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

Interjections.

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

To the leader: When I stand, you stop. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand why the Leader of the Opposition might want to deal with an issue like this in a very simplistic way. I understand that. I understand that that's a tactic. That's a political tactic.

The reality is that there are a number of things that are going on at the same time. The reality is that we did need to clean up the electricity mess. The solution that has come from the other side is to do nothing, to not make the changes that were made, not make those investments, and stick with coal, stick with a dirty grid, stick with air that was polluted—that's not a solution—and to not make the investments that are necessary.

We rejected that notion. We have made the investments that are necessary. I know—I know it clearly—that there are people in this province who have to pay too much on their electricity bill. We are going to take the PST, the provincial portion of the HST, off their bills, and we know we have to do more. We're very clear about that.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Does the Premier believe it's unethical for someone to request or accept a bribe to run for office, even if the law does not specifically address it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Absolutely, I would say on this side of the House, as all members would say, that any form of bribery is unacceptable.

If the member opposite is asking these questions in light of a case that is ongoing, as we have discussed before in this matter, that issue is before the courts. It would be highly inappropriate to discuss the facts of that case or to litigate that case before the House. There is a very clear rule of sub judice that exists in this House that warns us that we should not be discussing matters that are before a court or a tribunal. I'll urge, again, all members of the House to respect that very important rule.

You have ruled on that as well, Speaker, as have other Speakers. Let the courts pursue the matter.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, a federal prosecutor said the Minister of Energy asked for special treatment so he would resign as an MP and run for the Ontario Liberals. While Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed have been charged for offering a bribe, there's a loophole so that the person allegedly requesting a bribe or receiving a bribe isn't covered by the law.

Does the Premier believe bad ethics are okay if they fall through a legal loophole?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, this is a matter that has been subject to extensive investigation. This is a matter where allegations have been made. Charges have been laid based on the investigations done. Charges are laid against two individuals who are not members of this House. Those charges are now being prosecuted in a court of law.

The Minister of Energy has not been charged with anything whatsoever. He continues to do his job in an honourable way in that role.

It is not appropriate, as I said earlier, to be discussing this matter in this Legislature. This is an active matter, a legal matter, dealing with two individuals in the courts, and we should respect the process.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Premier and her House leader insist that everything is okay because the Minister of Energy hasn't been charged. At least one reason, perhaps, that he hasn't been charged is because of a technicality, a loophole. It's a basic of good ethics not to offer a bribe, not to ask for a bribe and not to accept a bribe. Today, the MPP for Timmins–James Bay is putting forward legislation to close that loophole and to put voters first.

My question is a pretty fundamental one: Will the Premier support putting voters first and closing that loophole?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: First of all, it's disappointing that what the NDP is trying to do is just score some political cheap shots, when we are dealing with real matters that are before the courts and that deal with individuals who have been alleged to have done some serious things. It is only appropriate that that matter be dealt with within the courts.

If the member opposite has a bill, that bill will go through the process that is a part of this House. It will be properly debated. It will be properly consulted. I look forward to participating in that conversation. I look forward to listening to the points of view of the others. But, Speaker, you don't just bring in provisions like this and expect that they be passed on a whim in the House when they have not gone through a serious analysis or discussion, when we have not done serious consideration and deliberation and heard from people like the Chief Electoral Officer, which is a very important part of the process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question. The leader of the third party.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have to say, I don't recall asking for unanimous consent for immediate passage of

the bill—just whether the Premier actually thinks it's a good idea.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier.

The Premier apologized to the Liberals on the weekend, although I'm not sure exactly what she thinks her mistake is because, frankly, nothing's changed. She's still planning to sell Hydro One, which will drive up costs even more for the people of Ontario. This is the kind of thing that makes people cynical, Speaker. The Premier's apology gets headlines, just like in 2014, but then she goes right back to helping her friends—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —and ignoring the people of this province.

Will the Premier show that her apology means something and stop the sell-off of Hydro One?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I said on the weekend is absolutely consistent with what we have been doing, which is to work to take costs off people's bills. We recognize—I recognize—that the upgrades that we have made in the system, the changes that we have made in the system to make it reliable and to make the grid clean, have a cost associated with them and that people are bearing an undue burden. We are making changes, including taking the provincial portion of the HST off, which was suggested by many people—but included in those people was the NDP—and so that is happening at the beginning of January.

No matter how many times the leader of the third party conflates the issue of the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One with the issue around electricity costs, Mr. Speaker, that does not make it so, does not make it true. The reality is that the Hydro One issue is about building infrastructure in this province, and we are going to continue to make those investments that are needed for the economy of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The people of Ontario can't pay their hydro bills. Who would have ever thought that the people in this province cannot pay their hydro bills? Having your power cut off because your bill has doubled and you can't afford it is the reality for far too many people in this province today. A hollow apology to a gathering of Liberals is not going to help those people. It doesn't help anyone except perhaps Liberals who want to feel better about themselves.

Will this Premier stop making this about her and her Liberal family, and start making it about the people of this province and commit to stopping any further sell-off of Hydro One so that the privatization of our electricity system ends once and for all in this province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that there are people in this province who are having trouble paying their electricity bills, so taking the debt retirement charge

off their bills is about them. Creating the Ontario Electricity Support Program is about them. Putting off new generating projects is about the people of Ontario and the costs that they can bear. Taking 8% off people's bills starting January 1 is about the people of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. Building infrastructure, building roads, building bridges, building transit—which a previous version of the NDP would support—is also about the people of Ontario. We are going to continue to make those investments and, at the same time, recognize that we have to continue to take costs off people's electricity bills. Both things are necessary.

1100

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, does this Premier know that over 80% of the people of this province do not support the sell-off of Hydro One? That's what she should be paying attention to.

Ontarians are hurting, and everybody knows it. People have lost their jobs because hydro costs have meant that their employers have not been able to keep them on. People can't pay their bills, and they're having to make the choice between groceries and keeping the lights on.

Continuing the privatization of Hydro One means that insiders get richer, friends of the Liberal Party get richer and more ordinary Ontarians will be hurting. That is the reality of privatization in this province from the day that party started it in the late 1990s. Now, how can anybody, anybody at all, take this Premier's apology seriously if she is still helping her friends and making life harder for the people of Ontario by continuing on the wrong-headed path of the sell-off of Hydro One?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, if the leader of the third party wants Ontarians to take her seriously, she's going to have to start dealing with the facts. The fact is, the broadening of the ownership of Hydro One has nothing to do with hydro rates in this province—absolutely nothing. You've got to be honest with the people of this province. You've got to be factual with them, Mr. Speaker. If you want credibility, you've got to deal with the facts—and those are, pure and simple, the facts.

We're investing in public transit because we have a Premier who has the courage to make the tough decisions you need to make to build transit, to build roads, to build bridges.

Mr. Speaker, I've come to the conclusion that there are two kind of politicians in this place: There are those who talk a big game and those who have the courage to take action to do what they need to do to make things happen in this province and build a strong—

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

Interjections.

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

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is for the Premier. The Liberals continue to allow a member of the Legislature who has been accused of seeking a bribe to sit as a minister of the crown. This just goes to show that integrity is a foreign concept when it comes to the Liberal Party. So I wasn't surprised yesterday when the Premier defended her Minister of Energy. But maybe the Premier has seen the light. Maybe she's willing to restore the integrity and trust in the Premier's office that Ontarians expect—like it used to be. So I'm going to ask again, Mr. Speaker, is the Premier finally ready to accept the resignation of the Minister of Energy?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, I was hoping for a moment that the member was standing up to apologize for his behaviour yesterday. Seeing as that didn't happen, I feel like I must remind the people opposite about a particular case that they probably remember—it didn't happen that long ago, in 2009—when the current PC member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock resigned her seat and accepted a paid position on the same day.

The Sudbury Star reported, "Scott Trades Seat For Head Office Job." The Sudbury Star went on to say that, "Progressive Conservative Laurie Scott was given the job Friday of getting the opposition party ready for the next election in exchange for giving up her seat in the Ontario Legislature."

The Peterborough Examiner: "In exchange for giving up her seat ... Scott is taking on the 'enormous responsibility' of election readiness chairwoman"—

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

Mr. Steve Clark: Ontarians will expect you to apologize for not asking for the minister to step aside till the court case is complete.

Speaker, since the Premier is so staunchly defending her Minister of Energy, the same way the Premier defended Pat Sorbara here in the Legislature, I hope she is willing to defend her actions in a court of law. I know she doesn't have to attend or testify in court. And I know the Premier doesn't always do the right thing. But here's her chance to avoid another mistake.

Will the Premier waive her privilege and appear as a witness? Will the Premier testify in the trial of Patricia Sorbara?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, there's a more recent example that I think raises a lot of questions when it comes to the ethical cloud the member opposite speaks about, and it relates to the Scarborough-Rouge River by-election.

I think all of us remember the very embarrassing flip-flop, flip-flop-flip of the Leader of the Opposition on the

sex ed curriculum. There was a candidate who was very clear about her opposition to the sex ed curriculum. She wasn't flip-flopping at all. Her name: Queenie Yu. She was a candidate in the Scarborough-Rouge River by-election. But then what happened, in some mysterious and secret exchange, was the PCs' top aide sent an email to Queenie Yu, flip-flopping on sex ed the very—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question. The member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm not sure what that had to do with the question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier.

For years, this government has been putting their interests first—bad ethics are okay as long as there's a legal loophole to get out of it. It's time to close those loopholes. This afternoon, I'll be introducing a bill to put voters first and make it clear that asking for a bribe is just as big an ethical violation as offering a bribe.

Will the Premier support this bill?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Attorney General.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The only thing I know about this bill so far is what the member opposite said in a media scrum, where I believe he wasn't able to answer most of the questions that the media put forward to him. I look forward to reviewing the bill when he gets the chance to table the bill, I'm assuming, this afternoon.

The member opposite has been a long-standing member of this House, so I know that he knows the process of this Legislature very, very well. He knows what it takes to have a second reading debate. I'm sure he has a slot at some time where he will debate the bill.

Interjections.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I'm sure there will be a slot when he will debate the bill. I look forward to being part of that debate. Then, the matter goes to committee and you get to hear from the public. The member knows that a substantive bill like this needs serious consideration.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, Minister, you're arguing that this is somehow complicated. It's pretty simple—it's illegal either to accept a bribe or to solicit a bribe. That's all we're trying to do here. There's nothing complicated. It seems to me and, I think, it seems to most Ontarians that if it's illegal to offer a bribe to somebody not to stand for office or to stand for office, the same should be true as trying to solicit.

So I ask you the question again: Will your government support this legislation when we call for the bill to be passed? Will you support it? Yes or no?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'm not going to determine whether or not I'm going to vote on a bill without even looking at the bill. What kind of question is this?

It's a simple bill. It's a simple concept. Show me the bill. Let's have a debate on the bill. I look forward to having those considerations.

You're talking about an ongoing process. What the NDP is doing is nothing less than playing politics. There are two individuals, who are presumed innocent, who are part of the process. They have been only engaged in sully the name of an honourable member of this House. Their whole motivation for this bill, from what I understand so far by listening to the member opposite, is to try to sully a member's name even further.

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Let's have a debate. I look forward to your bill. I'm sure he's got that bill drafted. Sometime soon there will be a debate. There will be deliberation. We'll get to hear from other people like the Chief Electoral Officer on that.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Education. We know our government is increasing investments in education all across Ontario, and thanks to those increased investments, graduation rates are up, test scores are up and more students are attending college and university.

We all know that the Conservatives ran on a plan to make deep cuts to our education system, and many of us remember the turmoil with teachers and the education system when they were in power. We reject that approach. We're taking a different path by making unprecedented investments in the future of students.

Those investments are paying off, no matter where a student goes to school. Could the minister please tell this House about how the changes to the funding formula are benefiting rural Ontario schools?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank our brilliant member from Kitchener Centre for that question.

Unlike the members of the PC Party, we believe that no matter where a student goes to school, they should have all the resources they need to succeed. That's why we've made changes to the funding formula to benefit rural Ontario: increased funding to support the higher cost of purchasing goods and services for small and rural school boards; increased funding for transportation, which recognizes the greater distances travelled in rural areas; we've invested in top-up supports to rural schools to fund the heating, lighting and maintenance costs; and provided funding for additional principals.

Even though the local PC member wanted to fire education workers in their communities, we increased—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, even though the local PC member wanted to fire education workers in their communities, we increased our investments to these important rural schools because our party believes that, no matter where you go to school, students should have the resources they need to succeed.

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

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'd like to thank the minister for her answer.

Our government has shown it is committed to ensuring that students in rural Ontario have an equal opportunity for an excellent education. In the 2015-16 school year alone, this government is providing \$3.7 billion in funding towards rural school boards.

Again, the Conservatives have an abysmal track record when it comes to education. We've seen that the only policy they want to talk about is sex ed, except they can't even seem to decide where they stand on that. When they were in power, they thought a good education policy was to run government-funded ads attacking our hard-working teachers.

Given this history, can the minister please inform this House of our long track record of increasing investments in rural school boards, even when the PC members were against it?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank again the member from Kitchener Centre. We've worked hard to make Ontario's education system one of the best in the world. Our graduation rates are at 85.5%.

Your question, however, was specifically about rural school boards, so let's look at Leeds-Grenville. For example, for Leeds-Grenville Catholic school boards, funding has increased by approximately 54.5% and per pupil funding has increased by 73% since 2003. Since 2003, we've also supported 16 new schools that are either open, under construction or planned, including North Grenville District High School, Thousand Islands Elementary School, St. Mark and Meadowview Public School.

Even though the member from that area ran on firing teachers in his own community—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: —we will continue to build Ontario's education—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. As I made note of the other day, I am concerned. When you start talking about somebody else's riding, I will start to interject. I don't like that practice from either side, when anyone declares doing something or saying something about another member's activity in their own riding.

Stay focused on policy. Stay focused on the concerns of what you're supposed to be covering.

New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. The government continues to ration health care. Yesterday, the Fraser Institute concluded that patients across the country are waiting longer than ever for care, including Ontario. Wait times are up by 10% this year. Surgeries have been cancelled across the province because the government no longer funds health care 12 months of the year.

When will the government properly fund health care and work with our front-line health care professionals to deliver top-quality care?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'm happy to answer this question with regard to the information that has come out from the PCs' favourite institute, I think, the Fraser Institute, that specifically looks at wait times across the province. I'm pleased to say that overall, when you measure wait times, the Fraser Institute has indicated that we have the shortest wait times in all of Canada in this province. It's really quite exciting. It shows the result of our investments in wait times specifically, nearly \$100 million focused just on wait times this year alone.

The time to get from a GP, a family doctor, for example, to a specialist—we are the shortest in the entire country: 25% below the national average. When it comes to that also important time from specialist to the procedure or the surgery or the treatment that you require, we're the second-shortest wait times in the entire country, at 20% below the national average.

So we're making important improvements. I'm happy to continue to address this in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: It's nice that the government picks and chooses what report to look at. But if you look at the Commonwealth report, the Commonwealth report has shown that Canada—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Please finish.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: The Commonwealth Fund report shows that Canada is 12th—

Interjection.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: —compared to other countries in the world.

The minister is happy with being the best of the worst. This side of the House wants us to be the best in the world—and they are far from doing so.

Wait times aren't the only problem in the health care system. The government continues to grow the bureaucracy to the detriment of front-line health care professionals. Yesterday, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario came out against Bill 41. Last week, the OMA came out against Bill 41. He's burning out our health care professionals, and after all this feedback, the Minister of Health calls the OMA a bunch of liars.

Interjections.

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

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Mr. Speaker, will the minister—

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

First of all, when I stand, you sit. Second of all, you will withdraw.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We were talking about the report he referenced, the Fraser Institute report. In all of Canada, we have the shortest wait time to get a CT scan. We have the shortest wait time in all of Canada to get an ultrasound. We have the shortest wait time in all of Can-

ada to get an MRI. Wait times for general surgery have gone down 13%—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, second time.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: —in the last year alone. Wait times for medical oncology, from 2015 to 2016, have gone down by 39%; that's in the last year. Elective cardiovascular surgery waits have gone down by 36%. That's all from the same report that that member happily referenced.

There is more work to be done, but I think we should all be proud of a health care system that's delivering to Ontarians and is the shortest in terms of wait times overall in the entire country. In the indicators that I've demonstrated as well, those important indicators in terms of getting to a specialist and getting your treatment, we're the best in the country.

MERCURY POISONING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, in response to our question asking the Liberal government to commit once and for all to clean the Wabigoon River of the mercury that has poisoned the people of Grassy Narrows, the Minister of the Environment said, "We will ... get the cleanup to the satisfaction of the chief and the health of the people of Grassy Narrows."

This morning, Chief Fobister of Grassy Narrows made this statement: "I invite the Premier to put this historic commitment in writing and sign it alongside me in proper ceremony so that we can know it is real." Will the Premier immediately contact the chief to sign the commitment for cleanup of Grassy Narrows once and for all?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have had conversations with the chief. I have been to Grassy Narrows. We are committed to doing everything in our power, as the Minister of the Environment said. We are committed to doing everything in our power to clean up Grassy Narrows, to take that mercury out of the ecosystem, to make sure that we do everything and that we are as diligent as we can be and as we have been in other situations, like the one that the member for Nickel Belt raised yesterday. Mr. Speaker, that's why there's \$300,000 to support water, sediment and fish sampling in the area.

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But as I have said many, many times, we are not going to act in contradiction of science that would say that if we take certain actions we will make the situation worse. We're not going to do that. One of the Japanese experts who recently made a report said, "It is possible that things get worse because of the turning of the soil and the water." Mr. Speaker, we will do everything in our power, but we will not make the situation worse.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Premier: The minister said the Liberal government will clean up to the satisfaction of the chief and the health of the people. It

couldn't be clearer. The people of Grassy Narrows, desperate for help, heard the words of the minister. My colleagues and I heard the words of the minister. The media heard the words of the minister. Again, now that the minister has finally committed, when will the Premier sign an agreement with the chief of Grassy Narrows and when will she begin the cleanup of Grassy Narrows once and for all?

Interjections.

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

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I think the member opposite would know the significance of what I'm about to say. My colleague the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation accepted a pipe during a pipe ceremony when he and I spent the day with Chief Fobister. If you understand the significance of what it means to accept a pipe from a chief—and both of us participated in the pipe ceremony—that is one of the most profound commitments I have ever seen taken on by a minister.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: How about a profound commitment on cleaning up Grassy Narrows?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Maybe you could show some respect, because this is important, and not interrupt. I listened carefully because I think this is an important issue.

When that pipe was accepted, that was a profound commitment by this government and by two ministers to see this through. As a matter of fact, the chief and the First Nation has been quite specific in tabling Dr. Rudd's report, which is two pages of action. More specifically, we are already months into fulfilling those commitments and funding them, Mr. Speaker.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. I know that health care is a top priority for our government. Providing all Ontarians with timely access to the care they need, whether at home, in their community or in one of the outstanding hospitals, is of the utmost importance to our government but also to me as the member from Barrie. I know our government increased funding for health care by \$1 billion to \$51.8 billion this year, and because of these continued investments in our health care system, we have seen major progress in Ontario.

Last week, in the fall economic statement, our government reaffirmed our commitment to investing in Ontario's health care system with a brand new announcement of an additional \$140 million for hospitals across Ontario.

Can the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care please tell us more about the progress Ontario has made and about the investments we continue to make to provide patients with high-quality care?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question from the member from Barrie.

Of course, earlier this year, in the spring budget, we announced a \$345-million investment in our hospitals. In addition to that—taking the total to over \$1 billion—investments in palliative care, in preventive medicine, in mental health, in a whole set of initiatives, including reducing our wait times.

I think it bears repeating: The Fraser Institute report that came out yesterday has agreed with us that we're making significant progress in reducing wait times, where we're the best in the country. We're 25% below the national average and we're first in the country—the shortest wait times for CTs, MRIs and ultrasound.

There's more work to be done, Mr. Speaker, but it demonstrates that that focused investment in our health care system, the more than 2% increase allocated this year alone, is having an impact which is being seen and felt by patients across this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Thank you, Minister, for that response. I know that all the hospitals across Ontario will be excited to hear that our government is continuing to make important investments that will help patients and their families receive better care and quicker access to services at every hospital across Ontario.

These investments will translate to better care for Ontarians, lower wait times and, as a result, improved health outcomes.

We all know the Conservative Party has a terrible track record when it comes to health care. When they were in power, they thought good health policy was seeing how many hospitals they could close. Our government is taking a different approach, and we're seeing the benefits of this approach throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can you inform this House about the investments our government is making throughout Ontario, but especially in rural communities, to improve health care?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We recognize that our rural and small-town communities have unique challenges when it comes to the delivery of health services. I'm proud that I've worked very hard, quite frankly, with all parties and with all members of this Legislature to ensure that the provision of those programs and services that Ontarians depend on are maintained.

Just to take one example, in terms of our commitment, we are working very closely with Brockville General Hospital. It's in the riding of Leeds–Grenville. As part of that \$140-million announcement that was in the fall economic statement that goes to our hospitals, an additional \$3.2 million is going to Brockville General Hospital alone. When you look at that increase in addition to the funding that they received earlier this year through the budget and through the LHIN, that's a 15% increase in the hospital funding for that one hospital alone in Brockville, which I know is very important to the member.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: My question is for the Premier.

Mike Carter operates Food Town, an independent grocery store in Milverton. Mike wanted to reduce his hydro bill. He also wanted to do his part to conserve energy, so he participated in Hydro One's Small Business Lighting program to help install energy-efficient lighting. But he went further: He also replaced his freezers and refrigerators, a very major investment.

My question is pretty simple. Having done all the right things, having invested tens of thousands of dollars to become more efficient, does the Premier agree that Mike should expect a lower hydro bill?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I'm absolutely sure that the member would have shared with Mike, with regard to his business, that as of January 1 he'll be getting an 8% cut in his hydro rate.

Interjections.

Hon. Brad Duguid: They mock that, Mr. Speaker, as though \$600 to \$800 a year isn't much to a small business. If it's around \$4,000 in costs, which sounds about right for the kind of business he's running, that's \$600 to \$800 that will be going back in Mike's pocket because of the very important decisions that this government has made, decisions that you obviously don't support. So maybe the member should explain to Mike why he doesn't think Mike's entitled to that \$600 to \$800 that our discount is going to provide him.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm glad the minister brought up the 8% reduction.

Speaker, if the Premier had any common sense, the answer would have simply been, "Yes, his bill should go down." But in Liberal Ontario, it's never so simple.

Milverton Food Town lowered its consumption, and because Mike now averages less than 50 kilowatts per month, how did Hydro One respond? They jacked up his delivery charge. They switched him from something called "general service demand" to "general service energy." The result? His delivery charge more than doubled, all because he's not using enough energy. His overall bill is up 30% and it's not even winter.

Speaker, I would like the Premier to answer Mike's question: "How do you even begin to justify something so stupid?"

Interjections.

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

Minister?

Hon. Brad Duguid: The Minister of Energy has taken a number of measures to reduce the cost of power in many different ways within the system—trying to improve the system, looking at more efficient ways of delivering the services, and he's continuing to do that.

But what he's bringing forward January 1 is something that's really important to small businesses, to families and to organizations across this province: an 8% reduction in their energy bills, as of January. Mr. Speaker, that's important. That's going to help small businesses like Mike's small business.

On top of that, for those small businesses we've also gotten rid of the capital tax, for Mike's business. We've also harmonized the sales taxes. That's saving businesses like Mike's thousands of dollars in administration costs.

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We've also got a number of issues—we've also reduced corporate capital taxes. Our capital taxes for businesses like Mike's are now 13% lower than the American average. That's a substantial amount of assistance for our small businesses, but, as the Premier said on the weekend, we've still got more work to do.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. In my city of Hamilton, Joe-Anne Priel, manager of emergency and community services, has sounded the alarm bells that the homelessness prevention program has run out of money, in part because of soaring electricity rates, which have created a critical need for programs that help vulnerable people with assistance for hydro bills. Vulnerable people in Hamilton and across the province are paying the price for this Premier's mistake of selling off Hydro One.

A vague apology won't save the homelessness prevention program or help pay the bills; stopping the sell-off of Hydro One and getting costs under control will.

What concrete steps will the Premier take to ensure that vulnerable people in my community and in communities across this province don't fall through the cracks because of soaring hydro bills?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Housing and responsible for poverty reduction.

Hon. Chris Ballard: Thank you for that very important question. First and foremost, the manager who has raised this alarm was a very valued member of our expert panel on ending homelessness. We really valued her input and the work that she did and continues to do within the city of Hamilton. There are a lot of fantastic programs that the city is running.

Our government recognizes the moral imperative to end homelessness in Ontario. As part of our efforts to end homelessness, we launched the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative on January 1, 2013. CHPI, as it's called, is a 100% provincially funded investment. It aims to improve access to adequate, suitable and affordable housing and homelessness services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Advocacy organizations around the province like Campaign 2000 are all reporting an increase in child poverty rates. In Hamilton, the connection between increasing poverty and the sell-off of Hydro One and increasing hydro rates is absolutely clear.

I'm really glad that this Premier's minister values Ms. Priel's opinion. I will quote her again: "We've basically just run out of money. We had a huge spike in October that we didn't expect in terms of people needing help with their hydro bills. A program aimed at preventing homelessness in the city of Hamilton has actually run out of money to help vulnerable people because of skyrocketing hydro bills.

When will this Premier do the right thing for the people of Ontario and stop any further sell-off of Hydro One and ensure that hydro bills come down for the long term and the short term?

Hon. Chris Ballard: I mentioned CHPI funding and the CHPI program in the first go-around. I can say that starting in 2017, we've increased funding by \$15 million each year for the next three years to that fund, and that's an awful lot of money. That will bring the total investment in that program to over \$2 billion by 2019-20—significant investments that recognize that our government understands the moral imperative to end homelessness in Ontario.

Under CHPI, the city of Hamilton received in 2015-16 over \$19 million. That's going up by about \$200,000 more each year incoming.

It's also important to note that municipalities are empowered to choose how those funds are used, based on their local needs.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is to the minister responsible for women's issues. Human trafficking is a devastating crime and a human rights violation that results in serious and long-term trauma. Some of the most vulnerable, poor people in our society are at most risk of being trafficked. It overwhelmingly targets young women, girls and boys and, in particular, those in indigenous communities. It is our duty to act decisively and effectively to protect them from exploitation.

I know our government takes this issue very seriously and recognizes the devastating impact human trafficking has on victims and their families. Could the minister share with the House what our government is doing to combat human trafficking in Ontario? I know how much it means to the province.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I want to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for this very important question.

Our government is taking strong action to end human trafficking. We've listened to experts, service providers and, most importantly, survivors, to develop our groundbreaking and comprehensive strategy on human trafficking. It's a \$72-million, four-year plan that imposes greater consequences for traffickers, creates stronger protections for those at greatest risk of being trafficked and provides better supports for survivors of human trafficking so that they are never trafficked again.

Our human trafficking strategy helps not only the girl next door, but women of all ages, racialized and indigen-

ous women, and even boys. We know human trafficking in Ontario disproportionately affects indigenous communities, which is why we have developed a \$100-million long-term strategy to end violence against indigenous women. We're working hard with a number of ministries on this very important strategy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Thank you for that answer, Minister. Seventy-two million dollars is really a huge investment to combat human trafficking. I know that in Kingston and the Islands, the Kingston police force is also working on this issue.

I'm proud of this government for taking such a strong stance on this issue and sending a clear message that human trafficking is not tolerated in Ontario. Ending this deplorable crime takes the coordination and co-operation of many ministries across government, and that is exactly what we're doing.

Could the minister go into some further detail about what our government's ministries are doing? I know it takes a lot of collaboration to build an effective framework. What are we doing to bring an end to human trafficking in Ontario?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: The member is right. We have made quite a bit of progress since this strategy was announced just this past June. Our anti-trafficking coordination office has been established, and our government has named Jennifer Richardson as the director of the new Provincial Anti-Human Trafficking Coordination Office. That will be run from the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Ms. Richardson is an expert in sexual exploitation issues and will bring best practices and lessons from her experience in Manitoba to here in Ontario.

As well, the police college is working with police stakeholders and other experts to develop their human trafficking course.

In addition to hiring three victim/witness services workers, the ministry of the Attorney General will establish human trafficking prosecution teams with six new crowns.

We are expanding the benefits available under the Victim Quick Response Program to better serve victims, and we're increasing funding so that our service providers can better support victims of human trafficking, as part of the Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario program—so, lots going on.

HYDRO RATES

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

Premier, we've heard numerous stories this morning about how people are doing what the government tells them and trying to keep their hydro bills down. The Vic Johnston Community Centre in Mississauga, a hockey arena, did just that. They actually spent \$40,000 to bring in energy-efficient LED products, new LED lights. It cost them \$40,000. They did actually save a lot of electricity. They

used 43,500 kilowatt hours less electricity, but did their bill go down? Their bill actually went up \$23,000 anyway. Only in Liberal Ontario could you cut your electricity usage by that much and still have your bill go up.

I know there's a lot of hockey fans in the Legislature. I'm not sure if the Premier is one or not. We have Red Kelly, the Hockey Hall of Famer, in the House here with us today. The manager of that facility wants to know—"I would like the province to tell us how they're going to fix it." We all want to know.

Premier, we heard your *mea culpa*. How are you going to fix it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Brad Duguid: We have responded to similar questions like this in the past—but I can't resist, Premier, and I'm sorry. To the member opposite, you brought up hockey. Red Kelly is in the House today. Those of us that are old enough to remember will remember when Lanny McDonald, Darryl Sittler, Ian Turnbull and Borje Salming led the Leafs to the Stanley Cup semifinals. But what did they power that on? Speaking of energy and power, what did they use? Something we haven't thought about before—

Interjection: Pyramid power.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Pyramid power. So maybe pyramid power is the answer to the member's question.

Anyway, let me just close by saying that the member's question was a serious one—

Interjections.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Some people are wondering what I'm talking about because they didn't follow that.

The member's question was a serious one. We take it very seriously, and we'll continue to work hard to bring down the price of electricity for those businesses.

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

The House recessed from 1141 to 1300.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Bisson assumes ballot item number 27 and Mr. Vanthof assumes ballot item number 65.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Miss Monique Taylor: It gives me great pleasure to welcome some folks today who are here for the reading of Bill 57. From Fraser Advocacy, I have Suzan Fraser. From the youth advisory group of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth: Noor Qubaia, Rachele Metatawabin and Claire Sherwood. From the OACAS,

Andrew Snowball, Silvia Wynter, Wendy Miller and David Rivard. Thank you so much for coming today.

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

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DURHAM COLLEGE

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you, Speaker, and good afternoon. I think it's important to recognize the value that international students bring to our higher education system. There's no better reference point than Durham College, located in my riding of Whitby–Oshawa. This year, Durham College welcomed 350 new international students to campus, bringing the total number of global students to more than 600, from 54 countries.

Durham College is inspiring students to consider new ways of thinking. The ability to effectively navigate and consider cultural differences are skills that make graduates better prepared and more effective in dealing with the realities of a globalized market.

A recent Global Affairs Canada study showed that international students spent \$11 billion in 2014 and they contributed \$9.3 billion to our gross domestic product.

Durham College is creating pathways that make it easier for international students to pursue their post-secondary studies in Canada. It is also expanding its efforts in international markets, including personal visits from the school's recruiting team.

Durham College celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2017 and it looks forward to increasing its international student body through even more and unique initiatives.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, we live in a great province and people across Ontario know that we can strengthen our public health care. But instead of helping to achieve that vision, the Premier and this current government are making things worse. Deep hospital cuts have led to hundreds of layoffs for nurses and front-line health care workers in my city of London. That's what Conservatives do when they're in office, but this Premier is doing it too.

This government has broken the relationship and has broken the trust with Ontario doctors, and now Bill 41 does nothing to fix our broken home care system. It does nothing to cut wait times for people or to help doctors and nurses do their jobs. People will continue to wait for the home care they need because this government is putting profits ahead of people.

Doctors have very serious concerns that this bill will make it harder for them to serve their patients. Today, Ontario's doctors are launching their campaign to encourage Ontarians to vote for better health care in the next election. I want to thank them for the work that they do every day across their communities.

New Democrats will continue to work with all health care professionals and health care workers to build a health care system that works better for families and seniors today and for the next generation of Ontarians.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: When I was elected, one of the first calls that my office received was from a mother who was in distress after attempting to admit her young son, who suffered from severe mental health and behavioural issues, into the hospital, only to learn that he would have to be in an adult ward with only older patients who also had severe mental illness.

Shortly thereafter, I learned that the North Simcoe Muskoka LHIN, which serves my community, was the only LHIN in the province without beds for youth mental health patients.

Bringing this important service to Barrie immediately became a top priority for me. On Monday I was pleased to join Eric Hoskins, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, to announce that the Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre had secured funding of \$3.2 million annually to support an eight-bed Child and Youth Mental Health Program, which will support over 300 in-patients and 3,000 outpatients every year.

The announcement included a moving performance by singer-songwriter Nathan Arends-Fraser about his struggle with depression and a speech by Jenna Wiseman, an RVH employee who had tremendous difficulty finding help for her own son who struggled with mental health issues.

There was fantastic support from community members who helped the hospital foundation raise millions of dollars towards this Hearts and Minds project. Thanks very much to them.

Services provided through the new care centre will include prevention and health promotion, assessment and specialized treatment based on individual needs, ranging from moderate to severe and complex conditions.

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

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'm thrilled that young people in my community—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further members' statements?

MUSLIM WELFARE CENTRE

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I feel very honoured to introduce the Muslim Welfare Centre, an organization that's been providing excellent community services locally and internationally for over 20 years. The centre is located in my riding of Scarborough—Rouge River. It serves all communities without any distinction. Their services include three food banks, school nutrition programs in 19 GTA schools, Meals on Wheels, two free medical clinics, and the list goes on.

Twenty years ago, they also established a shelter for needy women and children. It provides culturally sensitive services for them.

They began a new tradition by providing the first free halal Sunday lunch for homeless people in the Regent Park area. They also provide a similar service in my riding. These services are an important collaboration between various ethnic and religious groups, and it's a wonderful Canadian example of charitable giving.

They also work internationally on various projects, such as installing pumping wells and providing free education and health care programs in needy communities.

I'm especially proud to have known and worked alongside its founders, Mr. and Mrs. Major Abbas Ali. While this inspiring couple has since passed on, the centre has continued to do its mission and vision. I hope to continue working together with them in the spirit of "Service to humanity is service to God."

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I rise in solidarity with an Alberta MLA named Sandra Jansen who stood up and talked about some of the things she'd been called as a woman in politics. I want to add to that list, so that we should all know this. I know men have been called these names too, but sadly, it's about 90% men who do the calling.

I've been called "ridiculous," "a laughingstock." I've been told to put a gun in my mouth. I've been called "old," "a bitch," "hysterical," "silly," "inine" and "stupid." I've been called several words I can't say in the House. I've been told as a "dyke," all I need is a—fill in the blank. I've been called "a disgrace" and "immoral." I've been told that children should know their mother is a—again, fill in the blanks—words I cannot say in this House. I've been told to "try rape, you'd like it." I have been raped, and I didn't. Thank you very much.

I shudder to think that our daughters are being subjected to this kind of language and this kind of abuse online, and I shudder to think that some of our sons are engaged in doing this abuse online. It's time we all said, "Stop it. It's enough." It does erode our souls.

BREAD NOT STONES

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, as I know you are aware, we're joined today in Queen's Park by many United Church members who are involved in a project called Bread Not Stones. This project was started in 2014 to raise awareness about child poverty in Canada and to eradicate it.

The name Bread Not Stones was inspired by verse 9 in the book of Matthew that reads, "If a child asks for bread, who among us would give that child a stone?"

Recent statistics suggest that there are still too many children living in poverty, and one is too many.

Today, Bread Not Stones has given each member of provincial Parliament a rag doll. These handmade Dolls of Hope serve as a powerful symbol, and each one is unique. It has its own name and represents a child living in poverty somewhere in Canada. Many politicians and policymakers across the country have received these

dolls as a reminder of children who are still asking for bread.

The Ontario government recognizes the numbers are not good enough and in response has implemented many programs and initiatives, such as the Ontario Child Benefit and the Healthy Smiles Ontario program, and expanded nutrition programs for students as part of an ongoing effort to address the issue of child poverty.

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In my riding of Kingston and the Islands, there are many community organizations, service providers and individuals working hard to end child poverty and youth homelessness. Thank you to Bread Not Stones for their hard work. In their words, “Together we can do it!” Let’s not stop until it’s done.

CJPAC WOMEN IN POLITICS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Mrs. Gila Martow: I just had a wonderful lunch with a lot of Jewish women. They’re part of the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee, commonly known as CJPAC. Many people here go to their fantastic ACTION Party each spring. They’re doing a program called the Women in Politics Mentorship Program. Today we had a lunch, which was a kosher lunch, actually, by kosher Applause Catering—by David Silber, who grew up just across the street from me. We were joined by Julie Dabrusin, who is an MP in downtown Toronto, as well as my colleagues here in the House, Cheri, the MPP from Parkdale–High Park, and the Associate Minister of Education, Indira.

Basically, we told the women a little bit about how we got involved in politics, why we got involved in politics, what we liked about politics—luckily, there wasn’t too much time to talk about what we don’t like in politics—and encouraged them to get involved and consider helping somebody in a career in politics or having a career themselves in politics.

I just want to give a quick shout-out to Sherry Firestone—who was here; she’s the deputy chair of the CJPAC advisory board—and to the organizers of the whole program, Brianna Ames and Dani Peters. Thank you. We had about 20 women at the table. I’m hoping it’s a bigger crowd next time, and I’m encouraging people to get in touch with CJPAC and the women and join us here at Queen’s Park.

HIGHWAY ACCIDENT

Mr. John Vanthof: I’d like to take this opportunity to inform the House that there was a major accident on Highway 11 just south of Temagami this morning at 9 o’clock. It involved at least two tractor-trailers. The highway has been closed from Cobalt to North Bay for the foreseeable future. I’d like to express condolences on behalf of the House for the families involved and for the drivers involved. We don’t know what has happened yet but, judging by the mushroom cloud that we see from a distance, it was a very, very major accident.

Every winter, we go through this, where people have to fight the highways in northern Ontario and, when there is an accident—and accidents do happen. But in northern Ontario, when Highway 11 is closed, the access to medical services in other towns is closed. The access to your families is closed. There is a detour; you have to go to Quebec and come around. I can’t express how serious that is to be cut off. It also, once again, shows how important passenger rail service is to our part of the world and why it needs to be reinstated and why cancelling it five years ago was such a major mistake. You can’t continue to cut off pieces of this province.

SOLES4SOULS

Mr. Granville Anderson: I rise today to tell you all about a charitable project that recently took place at a high school in my riding, Holy Trinity Catholic Secondary School. Holy Trinity partnered with BioPed in Oshawa to run a Soles4Souls shoe drive at the beginning of November. Soles4Souls is a non-profit global initiative that fights poverty through the collection and distribution of new and used shoes.

After much hard work and dedication, Holy Trinity managed to collect 5,750 pairs of shoes, Mr. Speaker. These shoes will be donated to help residents in Haiti affected by Hurricane Matthew. Thanks to Sarah Zinkie, the teacher who spearheaded this collection of shoes, and thanks to her English class, who worked tirelessly to ensure this project was a success. Ms. Zinkie and her class made posters to promote the shoe drive. They distributed collection bags and gave out information sheets to classes all over the school.

I speak often about the selfless volunteers in my riding and the generosity of those who give so much back to our community. I am so pleased to be able to stand before you today and tell you all about Durham’s good news. My hope is that others will be inspired by this charitable work and that we can all continue projects such as this one all year round.

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

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I beg leave to present a report from the Standing Committee on General Government and move its adoption.

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Mr. Trevor Day): Your committee begs to report the following bill, as amended:

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

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the report be received and adopted? Agreed? Agreed. Carried.

Report adopted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Therefore, the bill is ordered for third reading.

Reports by committees?

Introduction—

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I'm awfully sorry. I didn't get an opportunity earlier to introduce some very important people—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry. We have to move to introduction of bills. It's not a point of order.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

PUTTING VOTERS FIRST (ELECTION AMENDMENT) ACT, 2016 LOI DE 2016 DONNANT LA PRIORITÉ AUX ÉLECTEURS (MODIFICATION DE LA LOI ÉLECTORALE)

Mr. Bisson moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 75, An Act to amend the Election Act / Projet de loi 75, Loi modifiant la Loi électorale.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those who are opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

The division bells rang from 1317 to 1322.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Bisson moves that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to amend the Election Act. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	French, Jennifer K.	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Anderson, Granville	Gretzky, Lisa	Naqvi, Yasir
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Hardeman, Ernie	Natyshak, Taras
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Potts, Arthur
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bisson, Gilles	Jaczek, Helena	Sattler, Peggy
Bradley, James J.	Jones, Sylvia	Scott, Laurie
Chiarelli, Bob	Kiwala, Sophie	Smith, Todd
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Leal, Jeff	Tabuns, Peter
Clark, Steve	MacCharles, Tracy	Taylor, Monique
Coe, Lorne	Mantha, Michael	Thompson, Lisa M.
Colle, Mike	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Coteau, Michael	Martow, Gila	Vernile, Daiene
Damerla, Dipika	McGarry, Kathryn	Walker, Bill
Delaney, Bob	Milczyn, Peter Z.	Wong, Soo
Dickson, Joe	Miller, Norm	Yurek, Jeff
Dong, Han	Miller, Paul	Zimmer, David
Fife, Catherine	Munro, Julia	

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 (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 53; the nays are 0.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, just a short statement in regards to the introduction of the bill. I have got to say, boy, I should be asking for unanimous consent from you guys to do the second and third reading—a change of heart over there. But let me do what I have to by rule of the House.

This bill amends the Election Act to prohibit a person from accepting or applying for a bribe to become a candidate in an election, to refrain from doing so or to withdraw as a candidate in an election.

Seeing the change of heart of the government, I'm wondering if there's any appetite for unanimous consent for second and third reading.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If you are asking specifically, it's an ask.

Introduction of bills? Last call for introduction of bills.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Scarborough—Rouge River on a point of order.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I feel very honoured to introduce three community leaders; they are executive members of the Muslim Welfare Centre of Toronto: Mr. Muhammad Iqbal Ali, right there, Mr. Shahid A. Khan and Mr. Muhammad Rehan. I'm very happy to introduce you. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Just for the member's sake, it's a little unorthodox. I understood what he was trying to do, but try to get it done during introductions, please.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I rise today in recognition of November 25 as the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Across Canada, domestic violence is the second most common reason for calls to emergency police services. For example, last year in Ontario, more than 10,000 women and over 6,900 of their children were served by an emergency violence-against-women shelter, and more than 40,000 women and 4,000 children received counselling from violence-against-women counsellors. There are many more grim statistics, including the fact that Ontario accounts for 65% of police-reported human trafficking cases in Canada; 70% are for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Just last month, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Gregory Taylor, released a report on family violence, noting that the impacts of family violence on health go beyond direct physical injury. They are widespread, long-lasting, and can be severe, particularly for mental health. It's clear that violence against women impacts us all, not just the women who are victims and survivors. It's their children, their families and also their communities. That's why everyone must be part of the solution.

I'm proud to say that our government is committed to doing more to protect women and their children from domestic violence. We have long recognized that Ontario needs a consistent, comprehensive and sustained approach to reducing and preventing this type of violence. Our Domestic Violence Action Plan has strengthened domestic violence programs and services, and our transformative *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment* outlines concrete steps we are taking to address sexual violence and harassment in our province.

Since releasing the plan in 2004, the Ontario Women's Directorate has implemented many initiatives to raise awareness of domestic violence and strengthen supports for victims, including the Neighbours, Friends and Families public education campaign, the Employment Training for Abused/At-Risk Women Program, the Language Interpreter Services program, and training for front-line professionals and service providers.

The women's directorate and my ministry are now working together to review existing programs and services to create an updated Domestic Violence Action Plan with the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

But the work doesn't stop there. In February, the Ontario government released *Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women*. This strategy builds on the existing work of indigenous partners, community organizations and government, and it reflects the priorities of indigenous leaders and communities to support healing.

Earlier this month, I was pleased to announce Jennifer Richardson as director of the new provincial Anti-Human Trafficking Coordination Office. As part of the \$72-million anti-human-trafficking strategy, this office will coordinate collaboration across government and with law enforcement, justice, social, health, education and child welfare sectors.

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Our investments recognize how vital it is that women get the immediate supports they need to move out of violent relationships and into a safer life for themselves and for their children. Together, our many programs and services are focused on our commitment to ending violence against women. Through the Ministry of Community and Social Services, we provide \$85 million to fund 96 emergency violence-against-women shelter agencies to support over 2,000 beds across the province. We also provide funding for counselling services for women and their children; programs to help children recover from witnessing violence; supports to help

women fleeing violence to find housing and connect with local community resources; and crisis telephone counselling lines, including Talk4Healing, a violence-against-women aboriginal helpline in northern Ontario.

This past year, I announced that we would be supporting the unique challenges faced by violence-against-women shelters and agencies in rural, remote and northern communities by investing more than \$1 million in 16 projects through the Rural Realities Fund. We are working with the Violence Against Women Stakeholder Advisory Group, with agencies and with our partner ministries to help agencies develop coordinated plans to respond to tragedies or crises involving violence against women in their communities. We have also partnered with Family Service Ontario to pilot couples' conjoined counselling programs for those experiencing situational violence.

In addition, almost 19,000 families receiving social assistance will see an increase in income by an average of \$282 per month or \$3,380 annually—most of whom are single-parent households. We also ensure that families receiving social assistance would fully benefit from the new federal Canada Child Benefit without any provincial clawback.

Our investments in programs to reduce violence against women have increased by 61% since 2003, but we know that funding is only part of the solution to this systemic problem. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the day when we end violence against women. In the short term, we will find better ways to protect women and their children, but in the long term, we will work to reduce the incidence of domestic violence.

I invite all honourable members to join us in our fight against domestic violence. Beginning November 25, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, until December 10, international Human Rights Day, there will be 16 Days of Activism, a campaign to galvanize action to end violence against women and girls around the world.

There are also several campaigns under way in the province this month, including the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses' *Wrapped in Courage* purple scarf campaign and the White Ribbon campaign. Throughout the month of November, the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses is inviting everyone in Ontario to show their support by wearing a purple scarf and letting abused women and their children know they are not alone.

Wearing a purple scarf is a symbol of the courage it takes a woman to leave her abuser. Wearing a purple scarf is a reminder that it takes the strength and support of an entire community to end violence against women. On November 28, OAITH will once again be at Queen's Park to celebrate International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and their *Wrapped in Courage* campaign. I would encourage all members to join in wearing a purple scarf on that day. We must work together so that every woman and child in Ontario can live free from violence. Let's make this a transformative time for women in Ontario and build a safer future for every woman and girl in this province.

ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

Hon. Michael Coteau: November is Adoption Awareness Month, and that's why I'm taking a few minutes today in the Legislature to talk about the importance of linking young people in our province with families and how our government is helping both children and caregivers access the support they need to find caring homes.

Mr. Speaker, we know that all children and youth need to benefit from the support, security and stability of a safe, loving, committed and permanent family. This is something that every child in our province deserves. That is why it's our goal to boost the number of children in care who can find adoption.

As minister responsible for children and youth services, it's my job to remove as many barriers as possible in order to help connect families with children. Last year, our government announced a number of improvements to our provincial adoption system to help them do just that. Many of those improvements have already come into effect, and children and youth in care and their adoptive families have started to access those services. We are continuing to increase stability in the lives of adopted crown wards and support adoptive families by helping more children and youth find permanent homes, helping adoptive families succeed with post-adoption resources and reducing financial barriers for families who want to adopt.

To help more children and youth in care with children's aid societies to find more permanent homes, we'll strengthen the adoption process here in the province of Ontario. We're doing this by funding 15 adoption recruiters in partnership with Wendy's Wonderful Kids. The Wendy's Wonderful Kids program focuses on finding homes for historically harder-to-place children, including older crown wards, siblings, and children and youth with special needs. Starting this month, these recruiters will be on the ground in communities right across this great province. They'll increase our capacity to find permanent homes for these young people.

We're also investing in province-wide adoption family supports to help children and youth with new families settle in comfortably with each other. We're working with Adopt4Life to extend their Parent2Parent Support Network so more families will have access to parent resources and peer support. This kind of resource is vital and helpful for families to connect with one another in order to chat about their experiences and share lessons learned.

Through the Adoption Council of Ontario, we are funding specialized training programs for parents who adopt through children's aid societies. The training will give parents the knowledge and skills needed to respond to the challenges they may face with their children. These programs will offer resources and support to families—the supports they need long after the adoption has been finalized.

We're also expanding financial supports to reduce financial barriers for families who want to adopt. More

families are now benefiting from expanded targeted subsidies for adopted crown wards. Our government has extended the Living and Learning Grant to include adopted crown wards. This is \$500 per month or \$2,000 per semester. These are grants to help them with educational expenses in post-secondary education. This change comes as a result of my ministry working closely in partnership with the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development. I want to thank the minister from that ministry for her help.

We're also extending health and dental benefits to now include adopted crown wards between the ages of 18 and 24. If they don't have access to drug and dental benefits, they'll have access to these supports in the future.

We're also working closely with indigenous partners to provide culturally appropriate living spaces and supports for children and youth as close to their communities as possible. That's why we're providing a one-time capital funding amount of \$5,000 for customary caregivers to provide safe, secure and comfortable environments to children and youth, as well as to make home repairs or purchase furniture and other items needed that meet the ministry and child well-being society standards. This will help ensure that children are kept as close to their homes and communities as possible.

With these programs and supports, we're delivering on two commitments: to help more children and youth in the care of children's aid societies to find permanent homes, and to make it easier for families in this province to adopt.

In Ontario, approximately 1,000 adoptions are completed each year through children's aid societies. With the improvements that we've put in place and that have come into effect this year, we believe that those numbers are going to grow. I'm proud that as a government we are putting in place these supports to make sure the next generation of young people in the province is set up for success. It's my goal and my duty as minister responsible for this file to ensure that all children and youth get the supports they need in order to succeed in life.

Mr. Speaker, each year, we are doing more for children and youth in care. With ongoing support and with our partners within the child welfare sector, we'll continue to work towards our goal to help these children and youth reach their full potential in a safe and loving family.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? Statements by ministries? Last call for statements by ministries.

Therefore, it's time for responses.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the PC Party and mark tomorrow as the International

Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the UN's 16 days of activism.

People around the world will be taking the time to shine light on an important issue that remains a major problem, not only in the developing world, but it is also widespread here in the developed world.

As I mentioned to the House last week, some countries in the world report that at some point in their lifetimes, 70% of women will face some form of physical and sexual violence just for being women. Some 90% of sexual assaults are still not reported to the police. Even here in Canada, fully one third of women experience some form of sexual assault at some point in their lives.

We all know that the evil crime of human sex trafficking primarily targets young girls and women and is one of the fastest-growing crimes in Canada: 90% of the victims are Canadian-born; Ontario accounts for 65% of the human trafficking cases in Canada.

In the face of these statistics, many at-risk women still feel that they don't have the support they need to protect themselves from attacks and threats. That is why this year's International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is so important. The theme is focused on the need for resources to prevent and end violence against women and girls, which are severely lacking.

As part of this year's efforts, the international community is called on to establish specific targets on ending violence against women and girls, noting that they must be adequately funded in order to bring real and significant changes to their lives.

Here in Ontario, we are very lucky to have some excellent grassroots organizations engaged directly in the fight against violence against women and in supporting victims on the often long and difficult road to recovery. Unfortunately, as I travel the province, all of the shelters and the organizations have seen an increase in the number of women coming forward to them on abuse, and a lot of older women coming forward because of historic abuse, even shocking the service providers.

I'm very proud of the organizations that we have in Ontario. Unfortunately, they do struggle to maintain this service in face of the high demand and limited resources.

Today, tomorrow and every day, we should all express our thanks and support for the front-line workers in all of our shelters and victim support organizations, but governments also need to ensure that they are properly allocating resources to help these dedicated organizations carry out their important work.

I want to say that I'm very proud that all MPPs have contributed to the Shoebox campaign. They will take shoeboxes to shelters and community organizations. I think that's a meaningful gesture and one that all Ontarians can take part in. I thank the member for Scarborough–Agincourt for being the lead and all parties for participating in that.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to call on all of us in this chamber to work together to do even more to eliminate violence against women and girls between now and the next international day. We can make a difference.

ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of the PC caucus and my leader, Patrick Brown, to recognize November as Adoption Awareness Month.

I recently met with the Adoption Council of Ontario to discuss ways we can improve our province's adoption process. There are approximately 17,000 children in foster care, but 6,000 of these children and youth will not return to their birth families and will need to be adopted. We can do a better job of matching these children with families, couples and individuals looking to adopt.

More than 60% of these children are over the age of 12. The majority of children who are ready for adoption are reaching or are in their teenage years. Unfortunately, there is still more work that needs to be done to support families who wish to adopt a teenager. As a result, every year, approximately 1,000 youth age out of the care system in Ontario before they are able to be matched with a family. Many of the children and youth enter our foster care system as a result of abuse, neglect or abandonment. Many have special and complex needs that need to be addressed. For example, 80% have special needs for care and over 50% have mental health issues. We need to ensure that when we match children with an adoptive family, we provide the necessary supports to help address the needs of these children.

It's clear there is a lot of work left to be done to improve the system, and it's important that we ensure the well-being and safety of our province's children and youth. No child should be left behind, and I call on the minister to ensure that each and every child in the system has the opportunity to have a forever family.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I rise today as NDP women's issues critic to recognize November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the first of 16 days of global activism to eliminate gender-based violence. The final day falls on December 10, Human Rights Day, drawing world attention to violence against women as a violation of the fundamental human rights of women and girls.

These 16 days are designated by the United Nations as a means of galvanizing countries around the world to take action against the daily reality of violence faced by women and girls.

Public education and awareness are powerful tools to end the violence, and New Democrats support the Ontario government's It's Never Okay ad campaign. But much more comprehensive efforts are needed to change the deeply entrenched attitudes and gender inequality that perpetuate violence against women in the first place.

One of the best ways to reach Ontarians with these messages is through the workplace. That's why this morning the Ontario Federation of Labour came to Queen's

Park to announce their pledge to negotiate paid leave for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, the vast majority of whom are women, in all collective agreements.

Three incredibly brave survivors accompanied the OFL and spoke of their own experiences of abuse: how the violence affected their ability to function at work, the impact it had on their children and the devastating trauma, even PTSD, they experienced.

Each of these survivors emphasized the importance of mandatory training in the workplace as a means of sensitizing employers and co-workers to the impact of domestic and sexual violence, and to recognize the warning signs and understand the risks.

Unfortunately, Speaker, we know that unionized workplaces make up only a small proportion of workplaces in Ontario. That's why the OFL also called today for the quick passage of Bill 26, my private member's bill to provide up to 10 days of paid leave for employees experiencing domestic violence or sexual violence, as well as mandatory workplace training on domestic and sexual violence.

The OFL recognizes that just as important as enabling women to deal with the violence and heal from the trauma is mandatory education to help make the violence stop.

The OFL is meeting this afternoon with the Premier, the Minister of Labour and the minister responsible for women's issues about my bill. I hope that this meeting galvanizes real activism by the Ontario government over the next 16 days by ensuring that Bill 26 becomes law as soon as possible.

ADOPTION AWARENESS MONTH

Miss Monique Taylor: It is my pleasure to rise as the NDP critic for children and youth services and to speak on behalf of our caucus in recognition of Adoption Awareness Month.

Every child deserves a forever family, a family to care for them, a family to nurture them, a family to provide the support and encouragement that we all need to make it through our lives.

Sadly, that is not the case for too many in our child welfare system. Without the support of a family, life is very difficult and the challenges can be insurmountable.

The Adoption Council of Canada offered the following statistics: 68% of homeless youth have aged out of the child welfare system without permanent families, only 44% of youth in the child welfare system graduate from high school and only 5% of those go on to post-secondary education, and 73% of those who have aged out of the system are unemployed.

It is of great importance to recognize the extreme overrepresentation of indigenous and black children. Those are the children who suffer the most from the inadequacies in our system.

Two years ago, in a keynote address about Canada's adoption crisis, our Governor General said that we are failing our children. The Provincial Advocate for Chil-

dren and Youth has said that Ontario's adoption system is riddled with red tape and needs to be overhauled.

There are about 30,000 children and youth eligible for adoption. The government says there are about 6,000 in Ontario waiting to be adopted but only about 1,500 families waiting for a child to adopt. These are the facts behind what the Adoption Council of Canada calls "a broken system." We must do better.

The Adoption Council of Ontario is asking people to respond to surveys on their website throughout November. They want to know how Ontario's adoption system can be improved. They are also encouraging people to make an appointment to speak to their MPP.

I look forward to those meetings, Speaker, and I encourage all members to open their doors and ensure that those voices are heard here in the Legislature.

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PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Toby Barrett: "Energy Poverty Petition.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

"Whereas over half of Ontario residents' power bills are delivery charges, regulatory charges and global adjustment;

"Whereas the implementation of cap-and-trade will drive the cost of electricity even higher and increase the cost of living in Ontario;

"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;

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

"To take immediate steps to reduce the total cost of electricity in Ontario, including costs associated with power consumed, delivery charges, administrative charges, global adjustment, tax and any other charges on Ontario residents' energy bills."

I fully agree with the sentiments contained herein and affix my signature.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario called "Support Survivors of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence.

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

"Whereas a 2014 national survey showed that Canadian workers who experience domestic violence often

disclose the violence to a co-worker, and that the violence frequently follows the worker to work; and

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

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

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

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

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

“That the Legislative Assembly pass Bill 26 to provide employees who have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence (or whose children have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence) with up to 10 days of paid leave, reasonable unpaid leave, and options for flexible work arrangements, and to require employers to provide mandatory workplace training about domestic violence and sexual violence.”

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

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to amend the vacant unit rebate on commercial property taxes in the province of Ontario.

“Whereas the vacant unit rebate on property taxes is widely acknowledged as contributing to the high number of empty neighbourhood retail storefronts ... and reduced economic activity in our community; and

“Whereas the vacant unit rebate precludes short-term and flexible leases, which have been proven to revitalize neighbourhood commercial strips by providing a more accessible entry point and fostering entrepreneurship; and

“Whereas the vacant unit rebate is widely acknowledged as a contributor to the lack of interest or necessity among landlords in lowering commercial lease rates and/or improving commercial properties; and

“Whereas the city of Toronto, in the course of public hearings in 2015, formally requested the province of Ontario amend the vacant unit rebate provision ‘for commercial and industrial properties, in order to enable the city to establish graduated vacant unit rebates that will induce and incent owners and tenants to meet eligibility criteria that align with the city’s economic growth and job creation objectives’; and

“Whereas there are millions of dollars in property tax revenue being lost that could help alleviate problems of homelessness, food security and other local issues; and

“Whereas the decision to amend or end the vacant unit rebate in our community ultimately requires the province of Ontario to amend the City of Toronto Act;

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

“That the province of Ontario amend the City of Toronto Act, granting the city of Toronto the power to delineate a specific category for neighbourhood retail commercial properties, and allowing them to set, amend and/or eliminate the vacant unit tax rebate for this category.”

I agree with this petition and I leave it with page Sage.

HIGHWAY RAMPS

Mrs. Julia Munro: “Whereas the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury will continue to have robust growth of population and commercial activity in proximity to the Holland Marsh, Ontario’s salad bowl, which consists of 7,000 acres of specialty crop area lands designated in the provincial Greenbelt Plan and is situated along the municipal boundary between King township and the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury, as bisected by Highway 400;

“Whereas the Canal Road ramps at Highway 400 provide critical access for farm operations within the Holland Marsh allowing for efficient transport of produce to market, delivery of materials and equipment and patronage of on-farm commercial activities; and

“Whereas the loss of that critical access to Highway 400 may threaten the significant financial benefits that the Holland Marsh contributes to the Ontario economy;

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

“That the council of the corporation of the town of Bradford West Gwillimbury hereby advises the Honourable Steven Del Duca, Minister of Transportation, that the town does not support the elimination of the Canal Road ramps at Highway 400, and further, that the town requests that the duration of the temporary closure of Canal Road between Wist Road and Davis Road be minimized to the greatest extent possible during the Highway 400/North Canal bridge replacement project.”

As I am in complete agreement, I have affixed my signature and given it to page Laurie.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “Hydro One Not for Sale! Say No to Privatization.

“Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

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

I fully support this petition, Speaker, and pass it on to page Calida to give to the table.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition that really gets to a scheme.

“Protecting Rewards Points Earned by Ontario Consumers.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas many companies are moving to or have already implemented new policies applying expiry time-lines to rewards points collected under their programs; and

“Whereas such an action is unreasonably punitive to consumers; and

“Whereas consumers are effectively exchanging personal information in return for access to these rewards programs in a transaction-like exchange;

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

“To protect consumers by amending the Consumer Protection Act, 2002, to prohibit the expiry of rewards points, and to credit them back to accounts where expiry has occurred.”

I agree with this petition. It reflects my private member’s bill, Speaker. I’m happy to sign it and leave it with page David.

HYDRO RATES

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

“Whereas the price of electricity has skyrocketed under the Ontario Liberal government;

“Whereas ever-higher hydro bills are a huge concern for everyone in the province, especially seniors and others on fixed incomes, who can’t afford to pay more;

“Whereas Ontario’s businesses say high electricity costs are making them uncompetitive, and have contributed to the loss of hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs;

“Whereas the recent Auditor General’s report found Ontarians overpaid for electricity by \$37 billion over the past eight years and estimates that we will overpay by an additional \$133 billion over the next 18 years if nothing changes;

“Whereas the cancellation of the Oakville and Mississauga gas plants costing \$1.1 billion, feed-in tariff (FIT) contracts with wind and solar companies, the sale of surplus energy to neighbouring jurisdictions at a loss, the debt retirement charge, the global adjustment and smart meters that haven’t met their conservation targets have all put upward pressure on hydro bills;

“Whereas the sale of 60% of Hydro One is opposed by a majority of Ontarians and will likely only lead to even higher hydro bills;

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

“To listen to Ontarians, reverse course on the Liberal government’s current hydro policies and take immediate steps to stabilize hydro bills.”

I agree with this petition and have supported it as well.

1400

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition entitled “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 support this 100%. I will sign it and send it to the table with a page.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here which is helping small communities in southwestern Ontario.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Cambridge, Ontario, is a municipality of over 125,000 people, many of whom commute into the greater Toronto area daily;

“Whereas the current commuting options available for travel between the Waterloo region and the GTA are inefficient and time-consuming, as well as environmentally damaging;

“Whereas the residents of Cambridge and the Waterloo region believe that they would be well-served by commuter rail transit that connects the region to the Milton line, and that this infrastructure would have positive, tangible economic benefits to the province of Ontario;

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

“Direct crown agency Metrolinx to commission a feasibility study into building a rail line that connects the city of Cambridge to the GO train station in Milton, and to complete this study in a timely manner and communicate the results to the municipal government of Cambridge.”

An excellent idea; I appreciate these people giving me this petition. I agree with it, and I’ll leave it with Calida.

HYDRO RATES

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

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

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

“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;

“Whereas the market rate for electricity, according to IESO data, has been less than three cents per kilowatt hour to date in 2016, yet the Liberal government’s lack of responsible science-based planning has not allowed these reductions to be passed on to Ontarians, resulting in electrical bills several times more than that amount;

“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;

“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;

“Whereas the ill-conceived energy policies of this Liberal government that ignored the advice of independent experts and government agencies, such as the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) and the independent electrical system operator (IESO), and are not based on science have resulted in Ontarians’ electricity costs rising, despite lower natural gas costs and increased energy conservation in the province;

“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 associ-

ated with power consumed, the global adjustment, delivery charges, administrative charges, tax and any other charges added to Ontarians’ energy bills.”

I’m signing it and giving it to Giulia, who almost has my name.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition signed by many residents of London West. It is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and reads as follows:

“Whereas quality care for the 78,000 residents of (LTC) homes is a priority for many Ontario families; and

“Whereas the provincial government does not provide adequate funding to ensure care and staffing levels in LTC homes to keep pace with residents’ increasing acuity and the growing number of residents with complex behaviours; and

“Whereas several Ontario coroner’s inquests into LTC homes deaths have recommended an increase in direct hands-on care for residents and staffing levels and the most reputable studies on this topic recommend 4.1 hours of direct care per day;

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

“Amend the LTC Homes Act (2007) for a legislated minimum care standard of four hours per resident per day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix.”

I fully agree with this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Anne to take to table.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time for petitions has expired.

TIME ALLOCATION

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the minister responsible for women’s issues and accessibility.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the organization of Bill 7 in committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Do we have consent? Agreed.

I recognize Minister MacCharles.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I move that the order of this House from this morning, Thursday, November 24, 2016, be amended by striking out the following:

“That the deadline for requests to appear be Friday, November 25, 2016, at 5 p.m.”

And it be replaced with:

“That the deadline for requests to appear be Friday, November 25, 2016, at 12:30 p.m.; and

“That, should the hearings be oversubscribed, the Clerk of the Committee provide a list of all interested presenters to the subcommittee following the deadline for requests by 1 p.m.; and

“That each subcommittee member, or their delegate, provide their selections of witnesses based on the list of

interested presenters received from the Clerk of the Committee by 3 p.m. on Friday, November 25, 2016.”

I give it to page Adrian to bring to the table.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Ms. MacCharles has moved that the order of the House from this morning, Thursday, November 24—

Mr. Norm Miller: Dispense.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Dispense? Agreed? Agreed.

Does the motion carry? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

KATELYNN'S PRINCIPLE ACT (DECISIONS AFFECTING CHILDREN), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PRINCIPE DE KATELYNN (DÉCISIONS CONCERNANT DES ENFANTS)

Miss Taylor moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to enshrine Katelynn's Principle as the guiding principle for decisions regarding children / *Projet de loi 57, Loi visant à faire du Principe de Katelynn le principe directeur des décisions concernant des enfants.*

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Miss Monique Taylor: I feel incredibly privileged to rise today to speak to my private member's bill, Katelynn's Principle Act, an act named in the memory of a young girl who didn't have to die, an act that seeks to bring something good from her tragedy.

First, I want to thank all of those who have joined us here today for second reading of Katelynn's Principle Act: representatives from Katelynn's family, representatives from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth and representatives from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

In 2008, Katelynn Sampson died at the tender of age of seven, after being brutally abused over many months by her legal guardians. In 2012, they were found guilty of Katelynn's murder and sentenced to jail, but while justice has been served to those who directly caused Katelynn's death, that cannot be the final chapter to her story.

As the coroner's inquest into her death heard, Katelynn was let down by a system that failed to enshrine that she got the care and attention she needed. A Family Court judge had given custody of Katelynn to those legal guardians despite their previous involvement with child welfare agencies and despite their past criminal convictions. Those same guardians had themselves contacted the CAS to say that they couldn't care for Katelynn, but when the agency finally followed up 16 days later, they

were met with the lie that the school was taking care of things. Nobody checked with the school. Faxes got lost when being sent between agencies. Her school reported bruising and burns, but nobody followed up, and the school didn't contact the CAS to find out what happened to their report.

1410

Throughout all of this, nobody ever spoke to Katelynn. Instead, they chose only to speak to those who would, in the very near future, kill her.

Katelynn Sampson died because her abuse was not diligently investigated and she was never put at the centre of everyone's—or for that matter, anyone's—concern. She didn't just slip through the cracks. She went crashing through the gaps in the government systems impacting her short life, systems in which people could have acted to save her.

I recognize the efforts that have already been made to fix those gaps by various bodies, but this is our responsibility. When the government systems prove inadequate, it is our responsibility as legislators to put the necessary laws in place.

This bill seeks to mandate a stronger effort, to make sure that no other child has to suffer through a similar tragedy. It outlines a number of principles that put the child at the centre of decisions about them, giving full regard to their right to be heard, their heritage and the broad and diverse communities that the child identifies with.

The first recommendation coming out of the coroner's inquest into the death of Katelynn Sampson was that children be put at the centre of the decision-making process while in the care of government services. The recommendation was called Katelynn's Principle.

Speaker, I want the members to understand how Katelynn's Principle came to be, because it speaks to the value of this bill. It stems directly from the recommendations from youth who have been in care.

When the chief coroner investigated the death of Katelynn Sampson, submissions were received from stakeholders, one of which was the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. I commend the advocate for putting together a youth advisory group that included Claire, Noor and Rachelle, who are here with us today.

The group sifted through thousands of documents from the inquest to put together their own submissions and recommendations to the inquest. The main idea put forward by the youth advisory group was that children must be at the centre of the decision-making process.

We must recognize that this recommendation comes directly from those most experienced with these issues, people who know and understand the system from the point of view of children and youth, people who have lived experience that we're trying to improve.

Bill 57 requires that any person making a decision under Ontario legislation affecting children apply Katelynn's Principle when making that decision. It would respect children and give them a voice in decisions being

made about their lives. This is a fundamental point that is sadly lacking from our current legislation.

Katelynn Sampson could very well have been alive today if this bill was in effect eight years ago. Someone would have asked Katelynn directly about what was going on at home. They would have made sure that she was heard from directly when her home was visited. No direct contact was made with Katelynn by child welfare workers. This is tragic, and it cannot continue to happen.

The bill ensures that, as part of putting children at the centre of decisions, those adults who are involved in the decisions being made about them act as continual advocates throughout a child's care or whenever services are being provided to them. This effectively means that adults will have the responsibility to follow up on decisions that they make or that they witness.

In Katelynn's case, there were several incidents where adults did not follow up on her well-being, even though she was in a vulnerable situation. It is now time for a more humane and child-centred approach to all government systems that so intimately touch the lives of vulnerable children.

We must respect children by listening to them and actually hearing them. The advocate gathers youth from many areas of government care and services, and gives them a forum to voice their concerns. What is significant about the advocate's approach to advocacy is the belief in the children and youth, a belief in their ability to speak on their own behalf regarding their own experiences. This approach presumes that children have the capacity to be involved in decision-making, that their voices are legitimate, that they matter and that they must be heard.

Any wise parent will listen to their kids, seek their input and then make the decision. Our children often give us unexpected insights that help us. We know what it's like to look into our child's eyes and know when something is wrong, whether they feel safe or scared, whether they are comfortable or have needs.

Unfortunately, there are so many youth without parents or who, at any given time, might not be able to live with their parents or their family. Those children deserve the same attention, consideration and respect that we give our own children. Their thoughts, feelings, worries and opinions must be heard by those who work with them.

It is the government's responsibility to make sure that children in care get the same respect and attention that any parent gives to their child. We owe it to children and families to learn from the tragic lessons of Katelynn Sampson, as well as other children who have been harmed or have even died while in the care of government systems.

This bill provides an opportunity to do just that, a bill informed by youth who have themselves been in care and have experience within our government's systems. These amazing youth, including Claire, Noor and Rachelle, who spoke alongside me at a press conference about the bill, courageously took on this immense task of providing recommendations to the Chief Coroner over the course of a full year.

It was heartbreaking to hear Claire talk about how the group knew next to nothing about Katelynn, despite the thousands of documents, because, as I said, no one had ever spoken to her. They knew that she smiled a lot and that she liked pink. I deeply respect their commitment to this cause for future generations, and we should all be grateful for the time and effort that they have put into this. I would like to thank them for being a crucial part of this journey.

As mentioned, it came out of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth's office, but their inspiration comes from the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, a principle that, as many of us know, we don't live up to here in Canada.

That declaration, in turn, came from the groundbreaking work of Janusz Korczak, a pediatrician, educator and author who established an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto. His immense faith in those children meant that they independently managed democratic bodies within the orphanage, such as the children's court and the senate.

His love for them was complete and he would never desert them. In August of 1942, when the Nazis came to transport the children to Treblinka, Janusz Korczak was given a reprieve, which he refused, because his children needed him. He died with them at Treblinka.

That is where the notion of this child-centred decision-making had its birth. Today, we have an opportunity to put real meaning behind the rights of children in Ontario.

I am pleased to have heard support for this bill from various corners. As already mentioned, the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth played a big part by suggesting such a recommendation to the jury at the inquest of the death of Katelynn Sampson. The Ontario Association for Children's Aid Societies, who are with us today, have voiced their support, as has UNICEF Canada.

The Toronto Star closely documented the tragic story of Katelynn, as did every other media outlet. They followed the coroner's inquest and, when I introduced this bill, they printed an editorial calling on all parties to support it. In remembering Katelynn and the children who have been in harmful and tragic situations, I urge all members to support this bill.

Katelynn would have been 16 one month ago on October 24. Her mother held a sweet 16 party to remember her. Putting children at the centre of decisions made about them would be a remarkably fitting legacy in Katelynn's name.

1420

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: It is my honour to speak to Katelynn's Principle Act. We know that the act is meant to give children a say in decisions that are made about their care by those exercising authority under provincial legislation and the child welfare, youth justice and education systems.

What happened to Katelynn is a tragedy, Speaker. I want to acknowledge the people who are here today to

honour her and those who are here to support the bill. Thank you. I know the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the minister are very committed to taking any actions that will help to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Of course, I know a bit about this file, Speaker, being the former Minister of Children and Youth Services and, before February 2013, the parliamentary assistant to the then Minister of Children and Youth Services.

As acknowledged and referenced by the member from Hamilton Mountain, there are many recommendations from the jury associated with this inquest. I want to say, on behalf of the government, we thank the jury for their thoughtful work. We are continuing to consider recommendations that were directed to the children and youth services ministry.

We do support Bill 57 and all the principles it puts forward. We support child-centred legislation that promotes the best interests, protection and well-being of our children. We support a child's right to express their voice and views, to be engaged in a very respectful manner. And we believe that child protection legislation should, wherever possible, provide services to children and their families in a manner that is respectful of cultural, religious and regional differences.

Speaker, as many of us have talked about in the House before, we are considering changes to the Child and Family Services Act, following themes that were identified through a review of that act fairly recently. The recommendations from the Katelynn Sampson inquest are part of that work.

We know that children need to be at the centre of everything we do, and for the provincial child and family services legislation to reflect this. I understand the minister will be bringing forward legislation very soon to reform child welfare and the family services sector more broadly. I'm very proud to have worked on some of that—very, very proud.

This reform is needed—it's very much needed—because it will protect children and improve the responsiveness and the accountability for children's aid societies and all of our partners who protect children. I know the minister is working very hard with all of our stakeholders and with communities, youth, families and all parties to improve the quality of the care that children and families are receiving throughout this province.

I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for bringing this forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to thank everyone in the House today, particularly members of the family of Katelynn, for being here and supporting the efforts of this bill. It's a pleasure and an honour speak to Bill 57, Katelynn's Principle Act (Decisions Affecting Children), 2016.

Katelynn's Principle is named after seven-year-old Katelynn Sampson, who was killed at the hands of her legal guardians in 2008. The coroner's inquest examining

her death heard how multiple points of protection failed to interact with Katelynn.

Madam Speaker, just before I start, I want to encourage everyone out there to speak up. Bullying or abusive situations are not acceptable in any case. Everyone out there can play their part. They can speak up. They can reach out. They can listen. It reminds me of an organization that was founded in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, WES For Youth Online, which was really more about mental health, but it was the same thing: people having a service, people having the ability to reach out and find resources and find help. I think we can all be those listeners and watch for the signs of something like this happening and step up and do our part.

I'm pleased to contribute to today's debate and speak in support of a bill that seeks to fix the ongoing challenges with regard to protecting the rights of the children and youth of Ontario. How many times have we read about cases like Katelynn Sampson's and Jeffrey Baldwin's and said, "It doesn't need to be this way. What happened is unacceptable. We have to do better"?

Bill 57 aims to address that, and I commend the member from Hamilton Mountain for bringing it forward, and also the efforts on this bill by my colleague and friend the member from Dufferin-Caledon, Sylvia Jones.

The current child protection system has somehow lost sight of what's important. Bill 57 essentially recommit us to ascribing rights to children and ensuring that their voice and their point of view become central to all decision-making.

I understand the bill is the result of the recommendation made by the office of the children's advocate of Ontario, who recommended Katelynn's Principle in the belief that it would better protect children and youth. This principle was unanimously supported by all parties with standing at the Katelynn Sampson inquest. Mr. Irwin Elman, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, has said, "I believe that every child, regardless of their age, should be viewed as an individual bearing rights—such as those contained within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Child and Family Services Act—and who should be seen, heard, listened to, and respected. Katelynn's Principle embodies this belief in legislation."

In other words, it appears that our current child protection system has made our children invisible. With more than 8,300 crown wards and another 17,000 children in care in Ontario, I fully support the idea that we create a major shift in the child welfare system that will be child-centric. Their well-being should be the utmost priority for all of us, not only in the province but certainly and especially in this House.

As Ontario's policy-makers, we all have a duty to ensure that all children and youth feel that they matter and they have the opportunity to reach their full potential. For this reason, I was disappointed to read in last year's Auditor General report that there continues to be a lack of oversight by the ministry in ensuring that our child protection system is providing the best care to our province's children and youth in care.

It was equally troubling to read that the ministry is not ensuring that children's aid societies are implementing recommendations arising from investigations into the deaths of children involved with the societies. This is 10 years since the Auditor General sounded an alarm over the government's poor oversight that was resulting in children being put in harm's way.

In 2006, the Auditor General wrote that in one in five cases reviewed, safety assessments were late by an average of 15 days or never even completed. That's one third of cases that this government wasn't doing its job on. In the same year, the auditor also said that in about half of the files reviewed, the full investigation was not completed within the required 30 days. As I mentioned earlier, the auditor said that today, in 2016, not a single investigation was completed on time—not a single one. This is simply not acceptable.

The government has received 173 recommendations from the coroner's inquest into the death of Katelynn Sampson and 103 recommendations from the coroner's inquest into the death of Jeffrey Baldwin. That's 276 recommendations on just two cases. Clearly, the current child protection system is not working.

We owe it to Katelynn, Jeffrey and every other vulnerable child under our care to fix this mess of a system. Children's lives continue to be put at risk because this government won't fix the broken child protection system. I don't want to hear another "Thank you for your thoughtful recommendations" from the minister or the government. I want to see action for the protection of our children, our most valuable asset.

We have a duty to protect the rights of every child in Ontario. It is important that every decision affecting a child takes into consideration the impact it has on a child's life. Every child deserves a chance to live up to their potential, and no child should be left behind. It is important that we ensure the safety and well-being of our province's children and youth.

I look forward to seeing this bill receive unanimous support, and I'm proud and honoured to have spoken to it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Miller: I would like to recognize, first of all, the passion and dedication of my colleague and neighbour from Hamilton Mountain in bringing this very important bill forward. She is a relentless advocate for the rights and welfare of children in this province. You only need to pay witness to her work defending autistic children to know that, and I'm glad the children in this province have her as their champion at Queen's Park.

Bill 57 is An Act to enshrine Katelynn's Principle as the guiding principle for decisions affecting children. Katelynn's Principle is a set of principles, collectively, that should be applied in making decisions affecting children at all times.

1430

Katelynn's Principle puts the child at the centre of any decision affecting children under Ontario legislation.

Katelynn's Principle requires that every person who provides services to children is a child advocate and must act in that capacity from first contact and on a continuous basis thereafter. It was the first recommendation by the jury in the coroner's inquest into the tragic death of Katelynn Sampson.

Katelynn was just seven years old when she died in 2008. Her legal guardians were found guilty of murder. There are many, many instances where the system failed Katelynn. No one in child welfare services ever spoke to Katelynn after serious concerns were raised about her well-being. No one even saw her.

It was recommended to the jury by the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, with the ambition of better protecting our children and our youth. It was unanimously supported by all parties with standing at the inquest. Katelynn's Principle will help to prevent other tragic deaths like the death of Katelynn Sampson.

Katelynn's Principle places children at the centre of decisions affecting them. Katelynn's Principle should apply to all services, policies, legislation and decision-making affecting our children. Katelynn's Principle would enshrine in Ontario's law some of the most important human rights to protection and participation set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We must recognize and defend the human dignity and individual rights of every child. If we fail to see them, to listen to their voices, to protect their right to form and express their views freely or to include them in decisions that affect them, then we fail to defend those precious rights.

I'm sure you've all heard of Malala Yousafzai, the tireless advocate for girls' education in Pakistan, who was shot by the Taliban at the age of 15. She survived, and has been one of the world's most inspiring voices for the rights of children. She has said, "We realize the importance of our voice when we are silenced." We should never allow a child's voice to be silenced, and we should effectively listen and encourage it to be heard. If we fail to protect the inalienable human rights of a child and to listen to a child, we leave children at risk of terrible situations like Katelynn Sampson's situation.

Katelynn's Principle states that the child must be at the centre of all decisions, that the child as an individual has rights too: that the child must always be seen, the child's voice must be heard, and the child must be listened to and respected. Katelynn's Principle states that a child's heritage must be taken into consideration and respected also, which is critical given the shameful history of residential schools and the other injustices done to children in the history of this province and country.

Katelynn's Principle requires:

- that a child who is capable of forming their own views is able to express those views freely and safely about matters affecting them;

- that the child's views must be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity;

—that, in accordance with a child's age and maturity, the child must be given the opportunity to participate before any decisions affecting the child are made, whether the participation is direct or through a support person or representative;

—that, in accordance with a child's age and maturity, the child must be engaged through honest and respectful dialogue about how and why decisions affecting them are made; and

—that every person who provides services to children or services affecting children is a child advocate.

Critically, Speaker, any advocacy may be a child's lifeline, and it must occur from the point of first contact and on a continuous basis thereafter.

The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth supports this bill. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies endorses it. UNICEF Canada supports it. Bernice Sampson, Katelynn's mother, wants it passed. There is no reason—none—why this bill should not receive all-party support and move quickly to third reading and royal assent.

Children should be at the centre of all decisions affecting them. That should be the law in this province. Vulnerable children cannot wait for this to drag through the legislative process; they need our support today. Act on Katelynn's Principle now. I implore all my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support it today, and please ensure that this bill is heard at committee.

Nelson Mandela once said, "The true character of society is revealed in how it treats its children." We are a society that nurtures, promotes, supports and protects our children. Let us ensure that holds true in every part of our province, in every part of our child welfare, justice and education systems. Let us have a character we can be justly proud of.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to thank all of our visitors here to Queen's Park today for joining us: the family and advocates in the sector. I remember this specific tragic case quite clearly. I remember reading about this case in the paper, and I remember staring for a few minutes at the face of this beautiful young girl who was lost in this most horrific and tragic and appalling crime. It affected me both as a member of the community and also as a father of two little girls.

I believe that all of us here in this room and beyond this room have a responsibility to make sure that young people in our communities are protected. I know that 20 years ago there was a piece of legislation that went forward here in Ontario to ensure that if anyone saw any type of violence towards a young child, we all had a legal duty to report. I think that piece of legislation speaks to our characteristics as Ontarians when it comes to our young people and the collective effort we have. I believe the member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek was right when he said that the best way you can judge a society is how we look after our most vulnerable—and out of those most vulnerable, more specifically our children within

that group. There's no greater responsibility that we have as Ontarians than to ensure that our young people are taken care of.

We as a government aim to bring improvements into this system. This is something that we've been doing over the years and it's something that we're going to continue to keep doing. As Minister of Children and Youth Services here in Ontario, I see it as my duty to really work with the collective voice of this chamber, but also the collective voice of Ontarians, to ensure we put in place the policies that will make sure that at the end of the day our children are in the best possible situation.

I know the member opposite, in the second reading of this bill, Bill 57, attempts to do just that: to make sure that the young person is at the centre of all decision-making and interaction and thought for a child protection agency, but also, I think, for the broader society as a whole.

As a government, we are going to support Bill 57. We think it's an important piece of information and initiative to come forward into this Legislature to debate and decide upon. We support the child's right to express their voice during any type of process in child protection, and beyond that as well.

But also, Madam Speaker, we are going to bring forward reform. I've been very clear since being in this position in the last six months that we will bring forward potential legislation that, if passed, will drastically reform and improve child protection here in the province of Ontario. I have been mandated by the Premier to do this, and even beyond the Premier's mandate, I think there's a general will and a mandate from the people of Ontario to make changes to a system that is deeply in need of many changes, to ensure that young people are better placed for protection and these types of tragedies don't take place in the future.

Madam Speaker, we're going to make some changes in the system. We're trying to improve our child protection information network. I know there's a lot of work to be done on that piece, the technology piece. It's always challenging, but we need to work with all of our child protection agencies to ensure that the information that's collected is shared in an intelligent way that allows for agencies to communicate with each other to ensure young people are not falling between the cracks.

I know there's a lot more work to be done, but I will introduce a piece of legislation soon. If it's the will of the House for that legislation to go forward, I believe that it will drastically shift the way child protection is delivered here in the province of Ontario, to ensure that the young people in our province, regardless of their current family situation, are put into a place where they can be successful and loved and positioned to find the type of success that we think every child deserves in this province.

1440

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: Usually, I say I'm very pleased to rise and speak on a private member's bill, but this one is

difficult. We're talking on Bill 57, Katelynn's Principle Act (Decisions affecting Children).

Just for a little bit of background, Katelynn Sampson was seven years old when she was battered. It wasn't a one-time assault, where somebody lost control of their emotions or something happened. This was an ongoing assault to the point of multiple broken bones. Her liver was ruptured. Her teeth were protruding from her cheeks.

We have young children here listening. I'm sorry. I think that maybe we should have considered that. I just noticed their faces as I was speaking, and I apologize to them.

What I would say to the kids who are here is that when I was a child—and, I think, for most of the people here—there was a certain segment of society where children were to be seen and not heard. I was lucky that I did not grow up in that kind of household. My parents' friends actually thought that we were kind of rude, because we would talk to adults in a way that, normally, they thought only adults should talk to other adults. We would say things like, "You know what? Maybe you shouldn't put that over there. It could spill or fall"—something as simple as that, that an adult can say to another adult. But adults felt that children were being rude if they spoke up and thought something was dangerous, or a candle could catch the curtains on fire. It wasn't a child's place to speak out.

I think that what this bill is trying to do—sometimes words are easier to say, and to implement is another story. But absolutely, the child should be the centre of decision-making. I think we all agree on that, and we're all wondering why we need a bill to say the child should be the centre of any decision-making for the welfare of that child.

To say that a child has to be spoken to—of course a child should be spoken to. But we all know that it has to be done with a lens where it's understood that if a child is being abused, often a child will say things to protect their abuser. It's not enough to just speak to the child. We have to look a little bit deeper at the emotion, at the well-being of the child. Is the child participating in social activities, for instance? It's not enough just to feed a child and give a child a bed to sleep on at night. Children need a lot of nurturing and a lot of support.

I commend the member from Hamilton Mountain for bringing this debate forward, even though it's so difficult for all of us. She did say something interesting. She said that it's the government's responsibility, and to do the same as any parent. I think that it's the government's responsibility, certainly, to ensure that there is somebody taking care of the child the way our society expects children to be looked after.

As far as the government being able to love and nurture and bring a child to adulthood as a parent would, I would like to see that, but we all know that's very difficult. So we have to do whatever we can do within the parameter of how a child in a difficult situation can be taken care of. Should a child be removed from the home? Should a child be in foster care? Should a child perhaps be put up for adoption?

We've heard a bill about grandparents' rights. There are aunts, uncles and friends of the family and grandparents who want to be involved in a child's life, and sometimes the legal guardians or parents have the right to shut them out. We all know that's often not in the best interests of the child. We want to speak to the children in cases of divorce and hear their views.

I think that we're seeing a shift in society in terms of no longer are children to be seen and not heard, but that children are individuals. They don't all of a sudden magically begin having individual rights when they're 18. They are born with the right to be treated properly by their peers, to be treated properly and respected by other adults and, obviously, not to be abused, not to be hurt.

We've heard people say here already that there's a UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Well, we didn't need a UN declaration to tell us that here in the Legislature and here in Ontario. We definitely believe in the rights of children. We want to have a society that understands that it takes a village to raise a child. We don't need laws—unfortunately, maybe we do need laws to tell people that it's their legal right. What I'm saying is, we shouldn't have to need those laws. Obviously, we all are caring individuals and we would want somebody to care about our child. If our child is being left in a babysitter situation or at a friend's house or out of school, we would expect any adults or older children around to report anything that's dangerous for our children, and we would expect our friends and our neighbours and our relatives and ourselves to do the same as well.

This bill, as the Minister for Children and Youth Services alluded to, is just part of a puzzle. It's a puzzle piece for a much bigger puzzle of taking care of children in our society, and how we can ensure that every child is receiving the care and the nurturing that they deserve.

We see so often people outraged about the treatment of animals. I have a pet, a dog, and I am also sensitive to the issues for animals in our society, especially domesticated animals. But sometimes I'm disturbed by the amount of outrage that we see when an animal is harmed. Does that translate to human beings? I'd like to see a little more outrage sometimes when human beings aren't well taken care of. So I sometimes wonder to myself, if a child is being placed in an unsafe environment and neighbours possibly know about it, would the neighbours report it if it was an animal, if it was a dog, that was being treated the way that child was?

I hope that people do care about the children in their neighbourhoods, that they are watching. That's what we can get through to people at home, that when something happens to a child it's not because one thing went wrong, it's because 10 things went wrong and people didn't report. So please report if you know of anybody.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It is my honour to stand today to speak to Bill 57, Katelynn's Principle Act (Decisions Affecting Children). I want to start by applauding my colleague from Hamilton Mountain because I know that

her heart and her soul have gone into this bill. Every time she stands—whether it's in this House, in her constituency or outside of her constituency—and talks about the welfare of children, she means it. It's not just talk; she means it. It's very important to her.

Madam Speaker, we as parents encourage our children to come forward when they've had a bad day. We encourage our children to come forward if they're being bullied at school. We encourage our children to express themselves.

As it was said before, we know when something isn't right with our children. We know when they are struggling with something and we encourage dialogue. We want to help them work through that.

When they're at school they are encouraged to go to the education workers and tell them when they're being bullied, when they're being harassed, when they're having a difficult time at home. Whenever they're facing difficulties, they're encouraged to come forward and discuss that with the professionals in the education system.

Yet somehow, once they enter protective services, once they go into care, that conversation is not encouraged anymore. It's not at the heart of the decisions that are being made about these children. There is a huge disconnect between what we as parents tell our kids, what they're told in the education system and what happens when they're in the care of protective services and placed in a home that is not an ideal situation. I'm putting that very lightly when I say "not an ideal situation."

I believe in my heart that this bill addresses that issue. It says that it's not enough for children to go to school and say, "I'm having a hard time" or "Something bad is happening to me," or to show up with visible signs of abuse, and then, when it's reported, for that child to then not be consulted about what is going on and not be encouraged to express their feelings. This bill, in my opinion, will address that.

1450

We also need to make sure that those professionals, specifically those in the education system, are supported when they do come forward with their suspicions of neglect or abuse—if they know a child is struggling with something. We have seen in the past, unfortunately, when an education worker has come forward, they are penalized for coming forward with their suspicions. They are obligated to report their suspicions, and yet we have seen education workers who have been sued, personally sued because they brought those suspicions forward. I think that's really unfortunate.

I'm going to share a story that I don't share very often but I think it's important to the debate. When I was a baby—you'll have to bear with me, it's going to be difficult. When I was born, I was put up for adoption. I was put in care for a year before I was placed with a family, my family. They are my family. I stand here today and I represent the possibility for every child, every child in this province who goes into care, regardless of why they go into care. I stand here and represent the possibility for every child out there.

Katelynn didn't have the opportunity that I have. That's a pretty sad statement. At seven years old, her opportunity to do what I'm doing, to do what the people in the gallery are doing as advocates for children like Katelynn, ended. It's our obligation as legislators to give those children every opportunity I was given. It's our opportunity to say that they matter, that their feelings matter, that their opinions matter.

I encourage my children to share everything with me—everything. Let me tell you, sometimes I get things I don't want to hear, and I don't necessarily like. When you raise children to be independent and have opinions, sometimes that comes back to bite you.

We have an opportunity, those of us in this House, to do the right thing and give a voice to children like Katelynn so that they can grow up and they can someday stand in this place or in Ottawa and lend their voice to important discussions like we are having today.

To the people on the government side: I urge you to do the right thing, pass this bill, get it through committee and let's make it law before any other child—because there are too many stories like Katelynn's, far too many stories like Katelynn's. We need to give every child the opportunity to do what every one of us has the opportunity to do in this House.

With that, I'd just like to, again, applaud my colleague from Hamilton Mountain for bringing forward this bill. It's a very important bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: It's an honour for me to rise today and speak in support of Bill 57, An Act to enshrine Katelynn's Principle as the guiding principle for decisions affecting children. I want to recognize, of course, and thank the member before me who spoke. I want her to know that her concerns and her passion came through very clearly. I want to thank the member from Hamilton Mountain for bringing this forward, and I also want to acknowledge family and supporters of Katelynn who are here in the room with us today. I want you all to know that our hearts go out to all of you.

This bill is meant give children a say in decisions that are made about their care by those with authority and authorizing provincial legislation in the child welfare system, the justice system and the education system.

This is so important. This bill gives vulnerable children a voice, a voice to say when something's wrong. We have a responsibility in government and society to hear their cries.

They say that a child will tell you 1,000 times over when something is wrong. As parents and adults in society, we just have to take a moment and learn to listen.

I can tell you that as the Associate Minister of Education for early years and child care, I want you to know that a child's safety is at the forefront of my thoughts and plans when I look at early years and child care in this province. I also want you to know that there is nothing more heart-wrenching for all of us than to hear about the tragic, brutal death of a child.

Speaker, I used to be a 24-hour live news anchor, and nothing was more terrifying than to read a story like this one. This story did come across my desk during those years.

Our children are our most precious, lovely, shining reminders of life and our future, and when things go wrong, we all feel that loss and we all lose.

I want you all to know that we, that I support Bill 57 and the principles it puts forward. We support child-centred legislation that promotes the best interests, protection and well-being of children. We support a child's right to express their voice and views and to be engaged in a respectful manner. Once again, it's an honour to rise.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Hamilton Mountain to wrap up.

Miss Monique Taylor: There were so many wonderful speakers, and I really want to thank each and every one of you for taking part in this debate today.

I really have to give a special thank-you to the member from Windsor West for sharing her story of the importance of our child protection services and the difference that a placement and the difference that an opportunity could make in a person's life. It's the first time I'm hearing that story, and it really does show the difference in families and opportunities that our young people in child protection services can face.

I also have to do a really big thank you to Grace Kennedy, who is a student in my office. She's a McMaster University student in the social worker program. She has been in my office. She has worked so hard with the advocate's office and all of the people involved to bring this bill to life that we have today. Thank you to the youth who worked so hard in putting together the recommendations. The year that you spent gruelling over those documents to understand who Katelynn was, only to know that she smiled a lot and liked the colour pink—it really does show you the gaps that are in our system. So thank you for all of that work.

Thank you to the OACAS for being here today and to the representative for Britney Sampson, Katelynn's mom, who joins us today. It really is an important bill. It's important whether it's passed under me; it's important whether the government takes it and puts it in their own bill that they're bringing forward. It's just important that we put our children at the centre and focus of every decision.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

AUDITOR GENERAL
AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE VÉRIFICATEUR GÉNÉRAL

Mr. Norm Miller moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 67, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act with respect to public contractors / Projet de loi 67, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le vérificateur général en ce qui concerne les contractants publics.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 15—no, 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Norm Miller: I got a few extra minutes there, I see. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise in the House today to debate Bill 67, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act. As I start off debate on Bill 67, I'd just like to highlight the fact that this is the second time I've had this bill up for debate at private members' time. The last time came near the end of the 40th Parliament. It was one of the final private members' bills before the subsequent election, and it's safe to say that the political landscape has changed significantly since the spring of 2014. I think it was April 17 that it was last debated. Certain events since this time, in my opinion, have made this piece of legislation even more important to implement at this time than it was two years ago. I plan to outline this theme in the time that I have allotted.

1500

The position of the provincial Auditor General is entrenched across Canada. Every province has one. Their ability to follow the flow of public money is a key aspect of them successfully fulfilling their mandate. Central to this mandate is determining the value that the government receives on tax dollars spent. Bill 67 will give the Auditor General greater ability to follow the public dollar.

Throughout my time in the Legislature, including time served as the Chair of the public accounts committee, I have certainly found that value-for-money audits are one of the most useful tools in determining the performance of the government on key objectives. It's my sincere belief that there is not enough financial oversight in the province of Ontario.

In the Auditor General's 2015 report alone—I certainly recommend that everyone always look out to see the auditor's annual report—there were value-for-money audits conducted on child protection services, the CAS, the mines and minerals program, the SAMS computer system, student transportation, community care access centres, electricity power system planning and Hydro One. Unfortunately, due to the sale of Hydro One, that will be the last time that the Provincial Auditor will be able to audit Hydro One.

Value-for-money audits give a true accounting of what the costs of government programs are versus the value that they return to the people of Ontario. With the government promising a balanced budget by 2017-18, even in the face of doubts from our own Financial Accountability Officer, I believe that value-for-money audits are an extremely useful tool in finding much needed savings and trimming waste.

During my time as Chair of the public accounts committee—this being since the committee was formed

after the 2011 election—the investigation into Ornge air ambulance dominated the agenda for a significant period of time, for some two years. This is unusual in that usually the committee is looking at various aspects of the annual report, but two full years were spent on Ornge air ambulance. I want to refer to the special report from March 2012 on Ornge air ambulance and related services, from the Auditor General. In that, we note:

“Ornge’s management, with the approval of Ornge’s board, created a number of for-profit and not-for-profit subsidiaries and other companies. The relationships between these entities are complex. Ornge has entered into financial arrangements with many of these entities—for example, they provide most of Ornge’s air ambulance and administrative services and then bill Ornge for the cost of services rendered. Ornge advised us that these complex interrelationships were necessary to meet legal, tax and other objectives relating to, among other things, acquiring new sources of funding to enhance its services.

“In order for us to fully understand the fiscal and operational context of Ontario’s air ambulance services, we requested a number of documents relating to these arrangements. We were given access to only those documents relating to entities that were controlled by Ornge or of which Ornge was the beneficiary. We were refused access to the records of any of the other entities.”

Going on from that and leading from that was the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on Ornge air ambulance and related services—they had a number of reports; this is from the summary report, the section on page 18, where it says:

“Accessing necessary audit information:

“The Auditor General was unable to obtain all necessary information in the course of the 2011/2012 Ornge audit. The auditor was refused access to the records of any of the other entities, which Ornge had contracted with to provide, among other things, aviation, aircraft maintenance, pilot management, accounting and payroll processing services. Ornge’s management and board advised the Auditor General that this was because the ministry was not funding the other entities directly or indirectly (under the Auditor General Act the auditor is generally allowed access only to organizations funded by the provincial government).”

So the auditor was not able to do—at that point it was Jim McCarter—his job, to do a proper investigation, despite the fact, in the case of Ornge air ambulance, it was all tax dollars funding the organization, with the exception of some money that I would call a kickback from the purchase of helicopters. Otherwise, it was completely government funding, yet because Ornge created this complex web of companies, the auditor wasn’t able to follow those government dollars and see if they were being properly spent, and being spent with value. Madam Speaker, I would say that limited the ability of the auditor to do his job at that point.

Since 2011, there have been increasing demands on the office of the provincial Auditor General. Outside of the annual reports, there have been special audits com-

pleted on the Mississauga power plant, the Oakville power plant, the divestment of Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, winter highway maintenance, the community care access centres, changes to the Government Advertising Act, government payments to public sector unions and, most recently, security at the Pan Am and Parapan Am Games.

As you can imagine, a number of these audits posed challenges to follow the dollar under the current legislation. It is still the mandate of the Auditor General to be able to follow the money, and I believe Bill 67 would allow for her, Bonnie Lysyk, to be able to paint a clearer picture of how public funds are being administered.

A great example is the 2015 audit on Ontario’s community care access centres. As the funds flow through the ministry into the community care access centres, the next step often becomes cloudy. This is because service providers, private for-profit and not-for-profit entities, then administered care to patients. This step is where the auditor, by current law, sees the trail go cold. No law compels them to open their books for the purpose of a provincial audit.

I have to give the auditor credit for trying to work around these roadblocks, but without legislation to compel these service providers to open their books, the Provincial Auditor is unable to get a true picture of the value for the public dollar spent, in terms of patient care and how much it is ultimately benefiting the people in need of health care services administered through the community care access centres. With the specific nature of the audits into these organizations, it is becoming more difficult to follow the dollar through organizations that receive public funds.

Currently, when conducting audits, third-party service providers and indirect recipients of public funds are an area which the Provincial Auditor does not have access to. Some entities falling into these categories may comply with the requests of the audit, but could choose to provide only select information. When this is the case, it is difficult to get a clear picture of where the funds are going.

One such example is with the investigation into the cost of the Mississauga power plant cancellation. The proponent, Greenfield South Power Corp., who was under contract to build the plant, submitted only select financial information for the investigation. The company, as a third-party recipient of funds, could not be compelled to comply with such requests from the Auditor General.

Winter roads have been a significant issue in the past years, and the auditor did a special report, Winter Highway Maintenance, in April 2015. It was a very valuable report that she did, and lots of good information came from it. But again, in the case of winter road maintenance, most of that work is being done by private companies, and it is challenging for the auditor to be able to get the critical information that provides information on how to make sure our highways in the province of Ontario are safe.

The current limitation in the Auditor General Act stretches to many areas where public bodies contract out service delivery to private and for-profit third-party organizations. Specific areas where this information would be useful include details on profit margins, number of employees, salaries paid to senior management—and we saw this in the past year with disclosure from the Housing Services Corp. In fact, executive compensation was one of the major red flags that triggered more investigation into the Ornge air ambulance investigation. Third parties can also include organizations such as charities and non-profit groups.

1510

There is no doubt in my mind that this lack of information will make future audits less telling and therefore less useful. The auditor needs the correct tools to do the job. In this case, the current legislation can be improved to allow the auditor the ability to follow the dollars. Bill 67 is an amendment to the Auditor General Act that would help to modernize legislation to meet the more complex and changing nature of audit requests, regardless of overlapping areas of oversight. As more oversight and transparency in government is surely warranted and more independent officers of the Legislature have been added, it is important that the Auditor General be able to complete their audits and make useful, complete recommendations to the Legislature.

Passing Bill 67 will bring Ontario in line with other jurisdictions whose auditors benefit from this investigative power. Manitoba, Nova Scotia and British Columbia all have strengthened oversight to allow for third-party-recipient audits of public money.

Madam Speaker, I see I'm running out of time, so as I wrap up I'd like to mention that in 2014 I argued that if you take a look at Ornge and the special audits on the Mississauga and Oakville power plants, it is clear that the strengthening of the Auditor General Act is past due.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to my private member's bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's a pleasure to be able to rise and speak on behalf of the people of London–Fanshawe and weigh in on this bill that we have today which the member is bringing forward. This bill seeks to empower the Auditor General to conduct audits of public contractors and to report any findings of impropriety that the Auditor General encounters in the annual report.

The act currently governing the mandate and responsibilities of the Auditor General does not include any provisions for public contractors. A public contractor, of course, includes any entity or body that delivers programs or services on behalf of the crown and that receives payment or financial assistance from the crown or is empowered to collect fees for its services.

New Democrats are focused on putting people first and respecting the value of Ontarians' hard-earned tax dollars. It's why my colleague from Kitchener–Waterloo, with the support of the entire NDP caucus, successfully

championed the creation of the Financial Accountability Office. The Financial Accountability Officer and his office produce independent analysis and undertakes research to estimate the financial costs or financial benefits to the province of any bill or other proposal over which the Legislature has jurisdiction. As an independent office, research can be initiated by the Financial Accountability Officer or upon request from a member or a committee of the assembly.

Similarly, the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly that conducts value-for-money and financial audits of the provincial government, its ministries and its agencies. They also audit organizations in the broader public sector that receive provincial funding, such as hospitals, long-term-care homes, universities and colleges, and school boards. Our work helps to ensure that taxpayers receive value for their tax dollars. However, it is important that we empower the Auditor General with the tools necessary to truly scrutinize how this government is spending all public funding.

New Democrats have been pushing this government to keep their word to the people of Ontario. After each and every one of their scandals—and there have been many, Speaker—they have promised greater transparency. Rather than keeping their promise, they end up in yet another scandal, which equates to one more broken promise. A true measure of accountability and transparency would be to empower all our independent officers to do the job that the people of Ontario are depending on them to do. That's why my colleague Gilles Bisson, in a past session, brought forward a private member's bill, the Broader Public Sector Advertising Act, which would allow the Auditor General to review advertising by agencies such as Hydro One, OPG and other government agencies, corporations and publicly funded organizations.

Imagine what the finances in the province could have been if these independent officers were already in place and empowered. Perhaps Ontarians wouldn't be footing the bill for an over-budgeted Pan Am Games and the billions of dollars lost by the Ministry of Health in the Ornge and eHealth scandals alone. I know that the people of Ontario not only want but deserve to know that their hard-earned tax dollars are not being wasted. That is why New Democrats have already brought forward some important accountability measures, and I know that we will continue to push for more.

Currently, hundreds of corporations, boards, associations, consultants and other firms that receive millions of dollars of hard-earned tax dollars face no independent oversight, and the government doesn't need to release any information to the public. This bill would change that.

This bill, if enacted, would mean that all those contractors would be subject to an audit by an independent officer of the Legislature. But, most importantly, the findings would be made public and also bind those public contractors to provide information to the Auditor General as needed. That means contractors could not refuse to

provide the right information at the right time for the right purpose. It would provide the Auditor General free access to review all papers and all property of public contractors if the Auditor General's office believed such access was necessary to perform its duties.

I don't see why you would need to hide anything, especially when you have the privilege of receiving government dollars and when they're used in the purpose they were intended.

I will be supporting this bill on second reading and its referral to committee; however, I think it's a bill that could be looked at more closely and given stronger teeth. We must make sure to close the loopholes and that the right amendments are made to ensure this bill accomplishes the task at hand.

In summary, Speaker, I think it's a good bill and a positive step in the right direction. I challenge this government to disagree with the fact that we need to have more oversight and we need to have more accountability of the dollars that are being spent, not just in the wake of the recent scandals that we've seen by this Liberal government, but we need to have mechanisms in place to have oversight no matter which government is in power.

Speaker, the most recent example that we can look to is the sale of Hydro One and the questions around that money, that income that's coming from that sale, how it's going to be used and the transparency around that.

The Auditor General did the report, and of course they're saying that the money isn't going to be used for the purpose that it's intended. The government says it's all about infrastructure. There is speculation, Speaker, that the money is going to be used to pay down some of the debt.

This is why it's really important, Speaker, for independent officers to have the power to look at government agencies and public contractors, because for those public dollars, people work hard. They work hard to earn the money that they have and that they need. For us not to have accountability and transparency on how that money is used, I think it doesn't serve the public well. So having this bill come forward and allowing that to happen, where the Auditor General does have an ability to look at the books of public contractors, I think is a good idea. I look forward to hearing more debate on it.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Hon. David Zimmer: I'm pleased to offer my thoughts on An Act to amend the Auditor General Act with respect to public contractors, brought forward by the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I was looking at the explanatory note in Bill 67, and it's worth parsing, if you will, or deconstructing, so I make sure I understand it. I would be interested in hearing the member's comments on my comments in his reply. The explanatory note says: "The Auditor General Act is amended to permit the Auditor General to"—this is the important part—"conduct special audits of public contractors." Then we get into the definition of what a "public contractor" is: "A public contractor includes any

body or entity that delivers programs or services on behalf of the crown...."

So I gather that your bill speaks to the situation where a body, a contractor, in effect is acting as an agent of the crown in providing a service. It might be, for instance, a private entity that is providing snow removal on the highways of Ontario. If I read the bill correctly, that's exactly the sort of situation it's to cover. But it's with the addition that if they're providing that service as an agent of the government of Ontario, the crown, and it also receives payment for those agency services—in this case, to use the example, plowing the road, a public highway, on behalf of MTO—or it receives financial assistance to do that. The financial assistance, I gather, might be in the situation—there are some cases where the province would provide, buy the agent, the snow plower, a piece of equipment for the snow removal agency and, in addition to that, perhaps pay a fee for the actual plowing of the road.

1520

If that's the intent of the bill, I think it's a good one, because we do want to make sure that the government, if it's contracting with an agency or an agent contractor, and we are relying on that agent or that contractor to provide a service that the government would otherwise provide itself—we're doing that for a couple of reasons. We may be doing that for efficiency reasons or we may be doing that for the reason that the government is unable to supply or have the skill set to provide that service, but in any event, we're paying for the service to the agent, or the contractor, and we're paying for that service for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

So it does seem to me that there is a role for the Auditor General here to make sure that the money that we're giving to the agency to provide that service is spent for the purposes for which it was intended, and that the service itself is the service that the government expects will be provided and that the people of Ontario expect will be provided—in short, that the service provided is up to expectations and standards.

I would have one caution, and I expect the member can address that in his reply. It seems to me that if the auditor steps in to review the books, if you will, and the quality of the service provided by the agent contractor, the auditor would only be entitled to look into that portion of the contractor's or the agent's records and books that relate to the service provided on behalf of the government and the fee or compensation provided to that agent on behalf of the government.

The auditor would not be allowed to step in and have a broader look at other things that are not specifically related to that service that the agent contractor has been asked to provide by the crown, by the government, and also not to look into anything other than the money that the government has paid the agent to make sure it's all spent properly and the service is provided properly. If that's the situation, I am quite happy to support this bill, but I would like your assurance that my understanding, as I put it in the debate, is your understanding of the bill also.

I should have said when I stood up that I was going to be sharing my time with the very distinguished and hard-working member for Toronto Rosedale—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Centre.

Hon. David Zimmer: Toronto Centre. I get the Toronto ridings, the downtown ridings, mixed up sometimes, but I know the member for Toronto Centre has some views that he wants to—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Not right now.

Hon. David Zimmer: Not right now? All right, then thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'll be sharing my time with my esteemed colleagues from Wellington-Halton Hills and Thornhill as well.

It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 67, the Auditor General Amendment Act. This bill would amend the Auditor General Act to allow better access to information and the ability to audit public money and services. This bill is all about ensuring the province's Auditor General can truly and wholeheartedly do the job he or she is hired to do, which is to scrutinize and investigate irregularities and potential waste involved in the use of precious public dollars.

Bill 67 is really about Ontarians getting better transparency from their government at a time when our province is saddled with a shameful \$304-billion debt and when we, sadly, remain at the mercy of this tired and old Liberal government that, frankly, can no longer be trusted to hold itself to account, nor to be a force of good in people's lives.

Consider the trend over the last few years which has seen this government chip away at the investigative powers of different provincial watchdogs. We saw this with the Ombudsman's investigative powers over Hydro One—which the Liberal government removed—and government advertising, which allowed the Liberal government to spend \$800,000 on a brand new ad for the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan—the ORPP—a plan that was never implemented in Ontario by the government.

Let's not forget that this wasn't the first nor last time we saw, but couldn't investigate, the Liberals' practice of giving taxpayer-funded contracts to their crony friends and removing the people's watchdogs' power to stop them. In other words, Madam Speaker, you bet Ontarians need and deserve better transparency and accountability, and they have \$304 billion worth of reasons to want to give the Auditor General a bigger and better value-for-money mandate.

Madam Speaker, constituents in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and across this great province want to see progress because they are beyond frustrated with this government's track record of scandal and waste and their contempt for accountability and transparency. People want change.

In fact, all across Ontario, people are feeling disheartened by this government's reality-show-style politics, a

government shrouded in secrecy, corruption and scandals after 13 years of waste and mismanagement. It needs to be stopped, and to stop it we need the Auditor General to have the ability to compel them to open up the books and reveal this avalanche of waste that is eating up billions of taxpayer dollars every year and costing Ontarians many, many lost public services.

If you look at the scandals illuminated by the recent investigations—eHealth, Ornge, Pan Am bonuses, gas plants, the Sudbury by-election and the recent fire sale of Hydro One—they prove that we have a very weak checks-and-balances system.

Upon looking into the records of our past calls on the Auditor General to conduct special investigations into government organizations to uncover inefficiencies, irregular practices and the waste of public dollars, we found that too many times the Auditor General was prevented from doing this important work.

The system becomes even more weak as you consider parties who indirectly receive public money. There's simply no mechanism in place to audit them by the Auditor General. We saw this happen with the Ornge air ambulance scandal, where the AG was not able to scrutinize how some of the millions of dollars were spent, because Ornge's subcontracted companies received no direct funding from the province and as such were outside the AG's investigative jurisdiction.

Madam Speaker, this was a very well-thought-out scheme, a scheme deliberately to prevent the people of Ontario from following where their money went. Bill 67 will ensure we can shine a light on inefficiencies and unethical practices in an effort to fix them. I commend my colleague and friend and MPP for Parry Sound-Muskoka, Norm Miller, for championing this cause that is good for all of Ontario. It's progress Ontarians want and need.

Stopping waste and mismanagement of tax dollars will translate into better services and programs for the people of Ontario. It will mean redirecting money into better health care services, which will lead to fewer cancelled surgeries; better schools; not shutting down schools; and new long-term-care beds—not wait-lists—for vulnerable seniors.

People want to see where their hard-earned money goes and realize the benefit at a time when this government is taking in record revenues. People want an open and accessible government and an Auditor General's office that protects the public's money.

I ask: When the government and its bureaucratic institutions refuse to release information to the public, does the public then embrace complacency and do nothing? Of course not. They choose to demand accountability and transparency. So why don't we do that here today and pass Bill 67 by all members of all parties? Let's not forget that all-party support was given to this member's bill in 2014 before the government shut down.

Madam Speaker, I hope everyone will support this very good bill for Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in the House, and I'd like to start off on this bill, Bill 67, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act with respect to public contractors. I'd like to start by saying I wholeheartedly support this bill—100%.

This bill is fairly simple. It's fairly short. Sometimes we criticize bills for being fairly short, but this one is direct.

Anyone who's ever been involved in any kind of amateur sport or church group or any group knows that an audited statement is very important. The Auditor General audits the books for the province, an incredibly important job. But there's a lot of things where provincial money goes where she can't follow the trail. You would look at the CCACs—anything that's publicly contracted to a private contractor, the trail kind of goes cold. But these are public services, so the public has a right to know if they're getting value for money for those services.

1530

A good example is road maintenance. The public has a right to know. That's a really good example. I'd like to commend the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I drive through his riding on a weekly basis to get down here. As we speak, our road is closed. Highway 11 is closed as we speak from North Bay to Cobalt due to a major accident. There is no access to that part of northern Ontario as we speak—none. Now, we have to know—and it could very well not be road maintenance; we don't know at this point. But that is totally privately contracted right now. The decisions are made by private contractors, and the way it is now, we have no real way of knowing where that money goes.

That is one of the things that this bill is trying to fix. It's not complicated. It's pretty simple. I have a hard time understanding—not understanding. The government seems supportive, and that tells me that this bill is not really going anywhere after it passes second reading today, because what the government says and what the government does are two different things.

I'll give you an example. With the sale of Hydro One, another public service that is important to everyone in Ontario, whether it's totally privately held or semi-privately held, one of the first things the government did was remove the power of the independent officers to look at whether or not the money was actually being well spent for the people of Ontario. The first thing they did was remove the oversight of the Auditor General. Now, is that a demonstration that the government wants more scrutiny, better scrutiny? I would say that it's definitely a demonstration that they're not interested in more scrutiny at all, because whether or not we disagree or totally disagree with the sale, why wouldn't you, if you're still going to hold—the government says they want to hold 40%—why wouldn't you want public scrutiny over something that serves the public? Because Hydro One is serving the people—it's supposed to serve the people of Ontario. It's going exactly against the spirit of this bill to take that scrutiny away.

While the government speaks for this, I highly doubt that they truly believe in the intent of this bill. I know that the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka won't be shocked by this. We all hope that this bill goes forward—or that it might not be this bill, but that the government actually does something like this. Imagine if all our services that are actually provided through public money but are provided through private contractors—imagine if the Auditor General had the opportunity to actually look at all these services to make sure that the public was being adequately represented. It's not that if you're using a private service you're not allowed to make a profit. That's not the point. The point is, you have to know that the money is being well spent.

Perhaps one place that they could start—and this would be great for the people in northern Ontario—the moose tag lottery system is actually done in Tennessee. Perhaps the Auditor General could go to Tennessee and see if that's actually a good way to spend our money. I know that's a very small example, but those are the things we need to know.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Well, it is a global economy, my dear friend from Timiskaming. If you call for your Hyundai technical support anywhere in Ontario, you're talking to someone in Winnipeg and, I'm sure, you're talking to people all around the world. Our BlackBerry's are made in 17 different countries. It's the way the world is. I think it speaks to the complexity of that kind of thing. If we ever actually did what the member opposite just suggested—we would have to domesticate everything in an information-technology, global, Internet-of-everything economy—we'd be a very poor province.

I want to commend the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka for what I think is a very timely and helpful piece of legislation. Unlike the member for Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound or the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, I think there's a lot of us on this side of the House who find this legislation very helpful.

I'd like to talk about the idea that money that's paid by the crown should be traced and be traceable all the way to the ultimate end of its expenditure—it's really important. Some of the reforms—when I was Minister of Transportation—we now have an AFP process. We have P3. A lot of the infrastructure—our hospitals are now built on very complex models involving different consortiums in design and build, and many subcontractors and parties.

One of the challenges I had when I was Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure was trying to clean up the issues around the Herb Gray Parkway. Some of you will remember that involved the removal of about 800 girders and a lot of subcontractors and a lot of international companies. This kind of power in the hands of the Auditor General reinforces the ability of ministers to manage change.

I also find it very timely because it's interesting—and maybe members of the House haven't noticed, but the

way that cap-and-trade money is being allocated is through a level of scrutiny that is pretty detailed. First, there's a master spending plan for five years in the action plan that lays out ranges. It really restricts the government. Second, it is a regulatory fee, not a tax, so it's very restricted by law on what it can be spent on. After the five-year plan, every year I have to table in this House an investment plan for that year that details the one-year spending and all of the GHGs and costs associated with that. It's almost like a mini budget. Then I have to do an independent evaluation as the minister to Treasury Board before and after, and then evaluate it at the end myself. On top of that, the Environmental Commissioner does the same thing. The Financial Accountability Officer does the same thing, and of course the Auditor General will do the same thing, then it all has to be in the PRRT process and in the reports and accounts to that, and God knows, if I'm not called to public accounts on top of all of that for seven hours, there.

Some of the members opposite suggested that we don't have a lot of public accountability. Well, I just came back from Marrakesh. Every time I describe how many table officers—the Integrity Commissioner, the FAO—all the process of Treasury Board and public accounts—most of my colleagues from other states and provinces and regional governments just shake their heads and say, “You must spend half your time in approval processes.” We are actually probably dancing on the edge of not a lot of accountability—I would say we're sometimes drowning in accountability.

That's why I like this, to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. This is simple. It is clean. It doesn't create a different process. It uses an existing and respected officer of the Legislature. As my friend from Timiskaming–Cochrane said, it's a short, clear, crisp, concise bill that deserves support.

The other thing that we've been involved in—and this was all-party support, Bill 151. We're now getting rid of the IFOs. We're dissolving Waste Diversion Ontario. We're debureaucratizing the system by which we manage recycling and waste, and we're creating a new agency. This will be very helpful with the new resource recovery agency that will be managing our zero waste programs and our resource recovery programs, because that's the transaction of money between municipalities, contractors, recyclers, end of life. This kind of thing will make that process easier to audit with the green bank and the low-carbon deployment agency, which is going to deploy about \$2 billion of cap-and-trade money. I would also say to my friend, through you, Madam Speaker, this is going to help enable that. This will ensure that all the contracts and the payment out to homeowners, to businesses, to St. Marys Cement to help them reduce their contractors, to Pond Biofuels—this will ensure that public funds that come in from cap-and-trade will also be marched through this process using that and extending that.

1540

I welcome this. I think it's helpful. I think it's enabling. Certainly, with the new work we're doing on the

environment, on zero waste and on carbon, this will be a very helpful piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: It's a real pleasure to have this opportunity this afternoon to briefly speak in support of Bill 67, the Auditor General Amendment Act, which stands in the name of our colleague and friend the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka. As he said earlier in his presentation, he's demonstrating ongoing commitment to this concern. He raised it in the Legislature in the previous Parliament, right before the election in 2014, and he's continuing to advocate for this.

I think he's right to do so because I would suggest to you, Madam Speaker, that I think one of the most important functions of the Ontario Legislature—indeed, of any Parliament—is the financial oversight function. We have the various mechanisms through the Auditor General, the public accounts committee, and now the new officer of the Legislature who second-guesses, sometimes, the government's numbers, the Financial Accountability Officer. All of these are very important functions that need to be well done in order to ensure that the taxpayers' money is being well spent and that money isn't being wasted.

We look forward, always, to the release of the Auditor General's report. It's coming, I gather, fairly soon. It's usually early in December that the annual report comes. It seems to be getting thicker and thicker every year, which should cause concern to all of us.

We have a job to do to hold the government accountable. I would suggest that the opposition has an important role in that respect, obviously, but backbench government members have an obligation to hold their government accountable too. They may not do it in the Legislature, but I would certainly hope that they're doing it at least within the confines of private conversations and within the government caucus, because taxpayers' money should not be wasted. To the extent that we find waste, we should root it out and correct it. Obviously, that's part of this bill.

The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka is suggesting that accountability and transparency in government spending is becoming an increasingly important topic of conversation both within the Ontario Legislature and in the media, saying that members of the Legislature are increasingly calling on the Auditor General to conduct special assignments and audit government organizations to uncover inefficiencies, public dollars that are not being well spent and unethical practices.

Currently in Ontario, there are certain situations in which the Auditor General does not have the authority to audit all indirect recipients of public money or third-party service providers. I know that the Auditor General has expressed some measure of interest in this bill, and I believe she's supportive of the bill. I think that if this bill passes into law—not just is debated and passed at second reading and then sent to committee to die, but that the bill is actually passed, called for third reading and passed into

law, hopefully before Christmas so we can see progress on this and allow the Auditor General to ensure that she can do her job the way she should be able to do it, and to ensure that third-party recipients of government money are included within the audits.

The member talked about the Ornge air ambulance issue when he was the Chair of the public accounts committee. They dealt with this for two years, and there are still some outstanding issues. Certainly, there has to be greater oversight.

I would compliment the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka; he is one of our finest members. He has been here now for 15 years, which is very hard to believe. At the same time, he's one of the most well-respected and well-liked members by all sides of the House, and he does an outstanding job on behalf of his constituents and indeed for the people of Ontario.

So again, I want to congratulate the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka and encourage all members of the House to support this Bill 67.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today and speak in support of Bill 67, the Auditor General Amendment Act, put forward by my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka.

I think that people just assume that taxpayers' money is being watched very closely. It's a huge organization here, government, with many employees working here, and we have audits being done. They read about audits that are being done, and they just assume that the auditor—right now, it's Bonnie Lysyk in charge—has the tools that she needs to do the proper investigation and to follow the money, to basically follow the money trail.

We've been hearing about some of the companies that have been investigated by the auditor, including Ornge air ambulance. Basically, the entire set-up or scheme—whatever you want to call it—included for-profit subsidiary companies. That meant that secondary companies or even tertiary companies were doing business. So imagine company A doing business with company B, and company B is also doing business with Ornge air ambulance. Well, if we need to do a forensic accounting of the entire mess and the entire scandal, then the Auditor General has to be able to investigate the books and the records of these secondary and tertiary companies. Otherwise, how is she supposed to decide if the money is well spent or not?

There are loopholes, we all know. We've been reading in the newspaper this year about tax havens and off-shore bank accounts, which are used so that people can have their investments out of the country and, hopefully, the tax collectors—Revenue Canada—have no idea where that money is invested and they're not able to demand that the proper taxes are paid.

Well, the public is outraged when they hear of things that are being done so that people aren't paying their fair share or corporations aren't paying the taxes that they feel that the individuals are themselves paying. Well, the

same goes for these types of accounting messes, where the Auditor General isn't able to do the proper investigations. I think that people are right to assume that some of these secondary companies and tertiary companies and so on and so forth are actually created for the sole purpose of evading the audit, because they sense, possibly, that there may be an audit someday. I think that companies right now are looking at the fact that the Auditor General has her hands tied, and they're saying, "Oh, well, this is a great way to protect our interests: to put the money into other companies, and we can limit some of the fallout and some of the investigations."

We all are aware here that for every piece of legislation that we put forward and we approve and we pass, there are some very clever people out there in the real world figuring out how to get around it. What I would suggest is that the more power that we give to the Auditor General—we have to constantly be updating our ability to get the information that we need to make the right decisions, and the Auditor General needs the information that she needs to make the best decisions.

I just want to mention quickly that it's with discussions with the previous Auditor General and the present Auditor General that this piece of legislation is being recommended. It's not something that somebody here in the House with very little knowledge of what actually needs to be done so that they can do their job properly—we would expect our surgeon to have the tools in the operating room; we need to give the Auditor General the tools she needs as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka to wrap up.

Mr. Norm Miller: Let me thank the members who made comments or made speeches: the member from London–Fanshawe, the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, the member from Wellington–Halton Hills and the member from Thornhill. I hope that I got everybody. I appreciate their comments.

As I've stated previously, there are other provinces that do allow their auditors to follow the dollars no matter where they may lead. As the member from Thornhill just pointed out, there are situations where—I think it was the case with Ornge air ambulance—they did create these companies with the purpose of making it more difficult to follow the dollars. When it was eventually discovered that there were huge salaries being paid to some of the people involved with Ornge air ambulance, that was a red flag that really started a more serious investigation. But it was very difficult to get that information.

With the passage of this bill, it would allow the auditor to do her job more efficiently and more fully. We have limited dollars around. There are lots of desires for needs that people have. We do have a deficit at this time. We need to make our tax dollars go further, and we need to make sure those public contractors are doing a good

job, whether it's home care services through the CCAC, whether it's snow plowing services and winter road maintenance around Ontario, or whether it's the air ambulance.

I'm pleased that it sounds like I'm getting support, so I appreciate that and I look forward to this bill passing. I hope the government takes it the next step further and actually makes it the law of the land.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

1550

LUNG HEALTH ACT, 2016
LOI DE 2016 SUR
LA SANTÉ PULMONAIRE

Mr. McMeekin moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 71, An Act to establish the Lung Health Advisory Council and develop a provincial action plan respecting lung disease / Projet de loi 71, Loi créant le Conseil consultatif de la maladie pulmonaire et visant l'élaboration d'un plan d'action provincial à l'égard des maladies pulmonaires.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 78, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to have the opportunity to present An Act to establish the Lung Health Advisory Council and develop a provincial action plan respecting lung disease, affectionately referred to as the Lung Health Act, 2016.

I want to begin by acknowledging the Ontario Lung Association president George Habib, Chris Yaccato and the entire lung team who are here today. They have been tireless advocates for the importance of lung health issues. Thank you very much.

Of course, I would be remiss if I failed to draw attention to Minister McGarry, who can properly be referred to as the founding mother of this bill. Thank you, Kathryn.

Speaker, this bill is being co-sponsored by the honourable member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, Jeff Yurek, and by the MPP from Nickel Belt, France Gélinas. I thank them for their willingness to partner together on this bill.

As a past president of the Hamilton–Wentworth Lung Association, the issue of lung health has always been important to me. I suspect many of us have, indeed, been personally touched by lung disease. My dad and my sister both died of lung cancer, a very painful way to leave this world.

In 1978, I helped present a municipal bylaw in the city of Hamilton to ban smoking in all public places. It may have been the first in Ontario. It passed and was almost immediately challenged in the courts. The courts ruled that the city of Hamilton did not have the jurisdiction to pass such a bylaw.

Fast-forward 25 years: I was finally elected an MPP—I shouldn't say "finally;" I was elected an MPP—and I was able to join together with the then Minister of Health to argue for and to pass legislation banning smoking in public places. Now this, beyond anything else, proves that if you stick with it long enough, you can achieve some great things.

The Ontario Legislative Assembly has moved forward, Madam Speaker, with many lung-health-related initiatives. It is my sincere hope, and that of the three sponsors of this bill, that we will do so again today. Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths—cancers, cardiovascular disease, lung disease and diabetes—lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide plan. This bill proposes to establish a lung health advisory council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and require the minister to develop and implement an Ontario lung health action plan respecting research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung diseases.

While I applaud the initiatives already undertaken to protect lung health, including closing the coal-fired plants and the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, I know that without a comprehensive and coordinated plan, the growing human and economic burden of lung disease simply threatens to overcome our health care system. One in five Ontarians, or 2.4 million people, are living with a serious lung disease. This is projected to rise to 3.6 million over the next 30 years.

Friends, it's time—in fact, it's well beyond time—for us to move forward in a thoughtful and comprehensive fashion. This legislation does exactly that. I urge all members of this Legislative Assembly to embrace this joint initiative. It's a chance to do something good and wonderful together—together.

If we can move forward today, Madam Speaker, rest assured that Ontarians will thank us from the very bottom of their lungs.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm proud to stand up today and discuss Bill 71. I truly want to take this opportunity to thank the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westgate—

Mr. Ted McMeekin: Westdale.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Westdale. His riding's name is about as long as the bill's. It suits him.

I want to thank him for bringing it up. But I want to also thank the member from Nickel Belt, who has also co-sponsored the bill. It's great that we can push through these pieces of legislation, which are good for Ontarians, without a partisan stripe involved.

I want to thank the Lung Association for being here today as well: Andrea, Chris and George. I don't have my glasses. I can't see who else is over there, but to everyone else, thank you very much for being here.

Again, I want to thank the Legislature, for it seems to be that this will be passing unanimously. Our hope is that

perhaps by the end of next week, if we get the House leaders, maybe we could have this passed on our last day here at the Legislature in December. Maybe we can put that together. It's our hope.

I'm a strong advocate for improving lung health in this province. With the blessings of the Legislature here, we passed Ryan's Law, 2015, which allowed students to be able to carry their inhalers at school and to have lung action plans at the schools, in case of emergency, for the teachers and principals to deal with emergencies and to help clear up some of the allergens that are in the school system. I know that plan is still working its way through the system. The Lung Association has assured me that we will continue to press upon whoever is the Minister of Education, to ensure that we expedite the full implementation of Ryan's Law.

Having a council in order to help aid the minister in his decisions—with the size of the Ministry of Health—he needs that help, or she needs that help, depending on who's sitting as the minister. Having this council of experts to guide strategy, awareness and education with regard to lung health is key, because as the member spoke earlier, the costs of lung health are exponentially growing. Too many people in this province, I feel, don't have the medical help to help them breathe properly. The more we can do at this Legislature to improve upon awareness, education, strategy, medications, diagnosis and support of our health care professionals to improve those with lung health problems, the better we'll be. This legislation takes a step in the right direction. It's going to open so many doors as we improve this strategy.

Again, thank you to all members of the House for supporting this legislation. I'm proud to be a co-sponsor. Thank you for asking me to be a part of this, Ted and France. I'm also very thankful for this.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am very proud to rise today on behalf of my constituents in London West to speak in strong support of Bill 71, the Lung Health Act.

Unfortunately, my colleague the MPP for Nickel Belt was unable to be here today, but all members of this House will recognize her as a very passionate and compelling advocate for moving this issue forward.

I also, of course, want to recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for her work on this issue, as she introduced this bill in the last session. At the time, all members spoke strongly in support of the legislation. I want to congratulate the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale for not letting this issue just fall by the wayside and for working across party lines to bring it back so that we can have this debate once again and hopefully see this bill move forward.

1600

Of course, as my colleague is co-sponsoring the bill, it goes without saying that our caucus is strongly in favour of this bill. We're strongly in favour of establishing a lung health advisory council and a provincial lung health action plan, which is what is set out in Bill 71.

Currently, lung disease just doesn't get the same kind of attention as other chronic diseases and illnesses in Ontario. There are four chronic diseases that are responsible for four out of five of all deaths in this province: cancer, heart and stroke, lung disease and diabetes. Of those four illnesses and conditions, three have a provincial strategy. Lung disease is the only one of those four illnesses that does not have a provincial strategy. Without that dedicated, coordinated province-wide effort, we will not be able to minimize the health impacts and the economic burden of the disease.

Health Quality Ontario has stated that a clear strategy to improve results is essential if we are to make any progress in reducing hospitalizations and improving the quality of life of those who are living with this illness. Certainly, a coordinated and integrated approach to advancing Ontario's lung health is long overdue and is a welcome initiative.

As the member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale pointed out, all of us have personal stories of how our lives, our family members, were touched by lung disease. My father-in-law passed away from COPD. Currently, my brother and my father are both using puffers on a daily basis, struggling with lung disease. My mother also experienced lung disease before she passed away.

It is astonishingly prevalent throughout our communities in this province. One in five Ontarians is estimated to live with lung disease and struggles to breathe on a daily basis. That adds up to 2.8 million people who are living in this province and trying to deal with the impact of this illness. That number is expected to grow to 3.6 million over the next 30 years. It's a problem that is compounding and will only get more challenging to deal with.

We often think of lung disease as primarily affecting adults and people who have tobacco addictions—smokers. However, we know that asthma is actually the most common reason for children in Ontario to visit the hospital.

In my own community of London West, there are 125,000 people, including children, who are living with asthma. Chronic obstructive lung disease, which affects more than 75,000 residents in my riding, is the number one cause of hospitalization in Canada. Lung cancer kills more people than breast, ovarian, colon and prostate cancer combined.

There are serious human costs associated with lung disease in terms of pain and suffering, in terms of the social isolation that people experience when they are unable to participate in daily activities because they are struggling to breathe. Those human costs are immeasurable, but to go along with that, there are significant economic costs in terms of increased prescriptions, increased physician and ER visits and increased hospitalization.

The workplace is affected. When you have employees who are unable to go to work because of their condition, there is an impact on productivity, and lost wages.

The Ontario Lung Association: I do want to thank them for their advocacy on this issue and the research

and statistics that they provided to MPPs, which I found very helpful. The Ontario Lung Association estimates that the cost of the disease to the Ontario economy is about \$4 billion a year. And with the increased incidence, that is projected to rise to more than \$300 billion over the next three decades.

So we need this coordinated provincial strategy, Speaker. We need it now. I am glad to see this legislation moving forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge and on behalf of all those in Ontario who are suffering from lung disease.

I wanted to start off by saying a big thank you to the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale for co-sponsoring this bill, along with the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London and the member from Nickel Belt. This shows you, Speaker, the level of co-operation on this bill and how many people want to see this move forward.

My own story is that I've been a sort of respiratory disease expert as a nurse, from critical care to community care. I've also raised a son who had severe lung issues and narrowly avoided a lung transplant in the mid-1990s. I'm happy to say that my son Rory McGarry is now 36 years old, living with his new wife and baby, and suffers now from COPD; however, that's better than the alternative. So I'm just delighted to be here.

Before, as Mr. McMeekin said, I co-sponsored the first bill, and I really wanted to just address some of these points, Madam Speaker. This bill was called to committee on Monday, June 6, to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. We held public consultations on this bill before it died on the order paper in September. We had 15 experts and advocates in lung health speak in favour of the Lung Health Act. Today I just really wanted to capture a few of those comments from those people; they're worth hearing again.

First up, we had George Habib, the president and CEO for the Ontario Lung Association. He's quoted as saying: "Lung disease is accountable for a high proportion of hospitalizations, readmissions, emergency department visits, home care services and long-term-care services. In 2011 alone, we estimated direct and indirect costs at \$4 billion, and projections show that this number will rise to ... \$300 billion if it's status quo..."

Andrea Stevens Lavigne from the Ontario Lung Association, VP of provincial programs, spoke about significant savings to health care: "If every person who had moderate or severe COPD had access to pulmonary rehab, the number of COPD-related visits to emergency rooms would be reduced by 24% ... and length of stay by 50%." Imagine the savings, Speaker, to our health care system.

Bev Black came in. She's a lung health ambassador from St. Catharines, on oxygen. She's living with lung disease and she talked about her positive experience with

pulmonary rehab, and that it has helped her avoid emergency room visits, and given her life back to her.

We heard from Carole Madeley, the registered respiratory therapist and certified respiratory educator with the Lung Association, who spoke about the benefits of pulmonary rehab: "These programs have" proved "to decrease hospitalization visits, emergency department visits and readmission rates."

We next heard from Sherry Zarins—here today again—from the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance. She said: "We are acutely aware of the high cost of lung disease and the high proportion of costly hospitalizations, re-admittance to hospital, emergency room visits and home care services that are associated with lung disease and, in particular, with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease."

Chris Yaccato, GR for the Ontario Lung Association, said this bill "fits very well with" the "Patients First focus and can help lower wait times, save health care dollars and keep patients at home and out of hospitals."

Dr. Elizabeth Rea, the associate medical officer of health for the tuberculosis program at Toronto Public Health, spoke about the continued prevalence of TB in Toronto, which is infectious and continues to be a global health issue.

1610

Nancy Garvey spoke. She's from the Respiratory Therapy Society of Ontario. She is quoted as saying, "A lung health advisory will make responsible recommendations that have maximum impact on the burden of chronic and infectious respiratory disease..."

Dr. John Granton is the head of respirology at University Health Network's Women's College and Mount Sinai hospitals. He said, "Lung disease is one of the most common reasons we admit ... and ... readmit patients to hospital. Singularly, it is one of the largest diseases which influences our health care expenditures."

He concluded with, "The chances to improve productivity, ... reduce hospitalizations and ... improve the outcomes and the well-being of Ontarians with lung disease rely heavily on the passage of this bill."

Dr. Tom Kovesi is a pediatric respirologist from the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. He said that "a lung health advisory council would fill a key gap in Ontario's long-term planning in improving the health of Ontarians: the need to address the urgent and expanding issues of lung disease ... in adults ... babies, children and youth."

Dr. Andrea Gershon is a respirologist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. She spoke about the volume of COPD hospitalizations and emergency room visits. She is quoted as saying that it's increasing. "Our data forecasts that the direct costs of COPD—just the costs of the hospitalizations and the physician visits—will be \$10 billion in 2024, a \$2.3-billion increase from 2014."

Dr. Dawn Bowdish is Canada Research Chair in aging and immunity at McMaster University. I quote her as saying that COPD is "the leading cause of hospitalization in older adults.... We have ample data demonstrating that

community-based care by respiratory therapists ... and self-management strategies that can be taught to ... patients ... reduce the frequency of emergency room visits....” Ontario needs this bill “in order to implement quality, evidence-based, community-based care that will decrease these hospital visits.”

Bob Wood spoke to us from the Canadian Association of Radon Scientists and Technologists. He said that he supported the Lung Health Act because he knows that radon is the number one environmental cause of lung cancer in Ontario.

We next heard from Dr. George Chandy, the chair of the Ontario Thoracic Society, who said that “the Lung Health Act will help enforce a coordinated view on lung health” and allow patients “to access needed care in areas that are not ... in one silo....”

Finally, we heard from Loretta McCormick, a nurse practitioner at the COPD clinic from my hometown at the Cambridge Memorial Hospital. She said this bill “sets the stage for a much-needed structure on which to build a coordinated approach to the delivery of care” for individuals with lung health issues, especially with COPD. She also said it “provides for a top-down and bottom-up approach to the delivery of health care” for those with lung health issues “through educating the professionals providing the care.”

Speaker, these lung health experts and advocates across the province detailed why this bill is so important in improving the outcomes and quality of life for patients and their families living with lung disease, and why it’s so important in reducing health care costs in the future. I fully believe that all in the House will support the passage of this bill this afternoon.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I’ll be sharing my time with my colleagues from York–Simcoe and Thornhill. Thank you for the opportunity to add to this important debate on Bill 71, the Lung Health Act. My PC colleagues and I recognize and support the importance of lung health and how debilitating a chronic lung disease can be. As a long-time supporter of lung health, my sister, Marjorie, sadly passed away from lung cancer.

I support Bill 71 and commend the member for Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale for putting forward this PMB. I’d also like to acknowledge my health critic in my party and a co-sponsor, the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London, Jeff Yurek, and also give a shout-out for his passage of Ryan’s Law for asthma; the member from Nickel Belt, France Gélinas; and the minister of the MNR and the member from Cambridge, who introduced a similar PMB back in 2014.

Like many of my colleagues here, I’ve always been supportive of the Lung Association, presenting different petitions in the Legislature and attending events on lung health here at Queen’s Park and back in my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

I’ve also been supportive of the amazing advocacy work by the courageous little Madi Vanstone, who

brought her lung health battle to Queen’s Park. In her case, she fought and won her case to get the Ministry of Health to allow her access to Kalydeco, a drug to fight her cystic fibrosis and without which she would need a lung transplant. Luckily, Madi’s story had a sudden and happy ending after the government agreed to give her coverage of this lifesaving drug, albeit they did it under pressure from voters during the day of the election debate.

I’ve also been supportive of patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, or IPF. IPF is a rare lung disease that causes a rapid decline in lung function. Tragically, despite its very high mortality rate, patients in Ontario continue to go without as the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care continues to deny funding of lifesaving drug Esbriet.

I was truly saddened that despite the severity of lung disease, the government has refused to fully stand with patients with lung disease and rare diseases who were seeking access to treatments. As the party opposite will know, just last spring, 40 of their members voted down a motion from our colleague and a friend of mine, the MPP for Kitchener–Conestoga, Michael Harris, to create a select committee to examine the enormous challenges facing the rare disease community, which includes lung disease sufferers. With the estimated 2.4 million Ontarians currently living with a serious lung disease, and studies showing this number will rise to 3.6 million in the next three decades, the government should not be complacent in its efforts to fight chronic lung diseases.

I call upon the Minister of Health to take this opportunity to provide affordable access to care for lung disease patients in Ontario, and to continue to work with the Ontario Lung Association and Chris Yaccato and George Habib, who have personally invested a lot of time, efforts and energy into lung health.

I’d also like to thank members in the gallery and all of the volunteers, sponsors and donors. To quote or paraphrase George Habib, “Nothing really matters if you can’t breathe.” I hope we’ll have speedy passage of this, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for the time.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: First of all, thanks to the Lung Association. I want to thank everyone, of course, who was part of this bill. You’ve heard their names many times in the House this afternoon. Thanks to France Gélinas.

I want to highlight another of her bills, though, that we would ask for the government’s support because she has introduced it so many times. That’s about banning the sale of flavoured tobacco products because, as we all know, starting smoking is the problem. We have to do everything we can to stop our children from starting to smoke. Giving it up, that’s difficult—starting, sadly, is too easy still in this province. There’s a bill—again, introduced many times—that should have all-party approval as well.

Of course, like everyone else here, I have a family that’s touched by lung disease. My brother, who was a

musician, played in the rock band Lighthouse, if anybody remembers back that far. You still hear their songs on the radio. Every time I hear my brother on the radio, I think of him. He died tragically young from lung disease, from, again, smoking. He had given it up for 10 years before he died, which shows you how invasive that disease can be and why you should not smoke.

In fact, in my family, my mother and my father died before I was 20, both of lung disease—smoking, definitely. My father was from the era where, as a house painter, they used lead-based paints, if you remember back. One of the things I wanted to just touch on is there are environmental impacts, of course, in lung disease as well. I lost them before I was 20. I lost my grandmother, too, before then. The vast majority of my family are dead from lung disease.

They're still, of course—absolutely, passing this bill; this is important. But there's so much else that it seems we should be doing. Every time I see a Hollywood actor on the screen, in a movie, light up—it's not part of the plot. It's absolutely extraneous to anything that's happening dramatically. You know why it's there: It's paid for. We have to stop that. The reason kids start to smoke is because they think it's cool and they see people doing it that they look up to, actors, musicians, etc. Again, we have to look at who are mentoring and who are influencing our children, and really try to put pressure. I know it's difficult, but I know we're up against it in that instance. That's really the influence that I see.

Young women who sadly still take up smoking because of the myth that you lose weight or it'll help you lose weight. It's still out there. I couldn't believe this. My daughter talked about it. This is what she heard in school—please. This is ridiculous. These are the reasons kids start down that incredibly dangerous route.

1620

On the other environmental factors, though, I've been talking in this House about why we should not have a Union Pearson Express that runs on diesel, why all of our transit should be electrified: because diesel fumes also hurt our lungs. Transit generally: If we can get people out of their cars and into transit, we need to do that for the sake of our lungs, among other things. Cars are polluting, and that's a problem. When we talk about getting kids on bikes, yes, we should cycle, but I look at these young people cycling, breathing in the fumes in rush-hour traffic—which we'll all experience shortly—and I think, again, "There's got to be a better way." And there is. It's called public transit. We need to be investing in that.

I wanted to thank you too—I don't have much time left—for your handout: Lung Disease in Parkdale–High Park is what I've got. Every MPP got one of these. This is really informative and really interesting. Thank you for all your hard work on that and your research.

Again, it's a shock to see that 16.5% of people 12 years of age or older in my community report being a daily or occasional smoker. And, of course, asthma: It's somewhat lower in my vicinity than in other areas, but again, let's hope that we can electrify our transit, because

I fear it might go up with increased diesel transit running through my neighbourhood.

Thank you very much for all your work, Lung Association. Thank you to everyone involved in this important piece of legislation. It will make a difference. There's much more, of course, we need to do as well, so let's just do it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand today and speak to Bill 71, the Lung Health Act. I want to recognize, of course, the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale for his tireless efforts on this bill, and in addition, the Minister of Natural Resources.

I also want to take a moment to welcome the members of the Lung Association who are here with us today. It's always a pleasure to see them, and I know they've been working hard on this.

I'm pleased that my colleagues are moving forward with this joint initiative. Speaker, I want you to know that we've made great progress in Ontario in the fight against lung disease. We're not being complacent. Here's what we've been doing. We've banned coal-fired plants, we've overhauled the rules around smoking, and Ontario hasn't had a smog day since 2013. We're working hard, Speaker, to help Ontarians breathe easier.

In fact, Ontario has the lowest rates of respiratory deaths of all the provinces and territories in the country. But, Speaker, we know there is more work to do, and Bill 71 is a big step towards that goal.

We all know someone who is battling with some form of lung disease. Whether it's asthma, pneumonia, tuberculosis or lung cancer, lung-related illnesses impact all of us across the province. In fact, I currently have a close friend who is battling lung cancer, and not a day goes by without me thinking about him.

Bill 71 will help to prevent people from suffering from lung ailments. Among the actions laid out in the Lung Health Act: It would establish a lung health advisory council that would make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. That's a fantastic idea.

It would also develop and implement an action plan on research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment—an important step in care.

It would require the government to consider the council's recommendations in order to make improvements in lung health awareness, diagnosis, treatment and care.

Speaker, this is absolutely about prevention, detection and early intervention—so important. It's about improving the quality of life for millions of Ontarians and strengthening patient outcomes, strengthening the outcomes of our friends and neighbours who are really dealing with some challenges. It's about helping people breathe.

Across Canada, more than three million people cope with one of five serious respiratory diseases, and research shows the numbers are growing. It's troubling.

So many of these diseases are tied to an aging population. Here in Ontario, we are well aware of the situation. My work with seniors in the Ministry of Health made this issue very clear. We know that the number of Ontario seniors aged 65 and over is projected to more than double, from 2.2 million to over 4.5 million, by 2041. Speaker, Bill 71 helps us get better prepared for that increase. It helps us to prevent lung disease before it occurs, and it helps us treat it.

Most of us know someone affected by lung disease, and it's not just our senior population. It might be a parent suffering from pneumonia, a neighbour coping with chronic bronchitis or a child who relies on an inhaler to breathe. Asthma is the number one chronic disease. In fact, it's the most common reason for hospitalization of Ontario children. Think about that. Our children need to breathe.

But Bill 71 takes that fight a step further. It's a big step in the right direction, and it's the right thing to do. It will help to improve the health of Ontarians, from the very young to the not-so-young. It's a win for all of us. I'm pleased to support the Lung Health Act, so that we can all breathe.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: It's my pleasure today to rise and express my support for Bill 71, An Act to establish the Lung Health Advisory Council.

As people have chosen to put an emphasis on particular parts of this bill, I would just want to say that it's allowing a 20-member council including government representatives and various stakeholders in the lung health community, including at least one person representing each of the following:

- obviously, people with lung disease;
- their caregivers;
- their physicians;
- respiratory therapists and nurses;
- professionals with experience in the prevention and treatment of lung disease;
- researchers; and
- the not-for-profit community.

Of these 20 people, one member shall be appointed by the Ontario Lung Association.

The idea here is to be able to provide recommendations to the minister from the community, from the medical community, regarding the promotion of lung health for Ontarians, preventing lung diseases, and other matters that are relevant to lung health in Ontario.

When I think about lung health, I think of a young lady who I came to know, Madi Vanstone. I first met Madi at a local community recognition for volunteers. When I helped to present the recognition for her that night, as soon as the formal part was over, her family, friends and supporters all came and said, "Can you do something? There's a bigger issue. Yes, she got a volunteer award, but she needs Kalydeco. She needs this to be able to function."

So began the process here at the Legislature to make Madi and her problem known, not just here but across the province. It was certainly a united effort. The neighbourhood and her friends at school all came down; there was a tremendous support team that came for Madi. As we know, the Premier met with her, and she was able to receive the drug that she so badly needed.

But we all recognize that while we were successful for Madi, we needed to have a better process in place. That process is at the heart of this piece of legislation, so I think it's really important for us to recognize, whether it's a family member or a community member, that there are many people across the province who need to have the benefit of a provincial strategy. That's what we're talking about here today, Madam Speaker.

I think we have got to the point where we have all the parties in agreement. We have some amazing stories to tell, and now it's time to make sure that this bill is voted on and supported.

1630

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today and speak on Bill 71. Basically, we're talking about the Lung Health Act and how we would like to see a lung health advisory council and an action plan to address research, prevention, diagnosis, treatments and care—and why shouldn't we? Why shouldn't we have teams that address any issues to do with a patient's health? I think that there are a lot of models across the province and in the world where teams have worked together, different health care professionals have come together, and they realized that they accomplished so much more working as a team than just sending referral letters and correspondence and emails back and forth to each other over the care of the patient.

Of course, we would like to see this for any health care challenge that people have, not just for lung health. I think it's Breathers United who say, "When you can't breathe, nothing else matters." It reminds me of a great aunt I had who used to tell me when—I guess I wasn't much shorter than I am now because I never got very tall, but I was a lot younger. I would say I was maybe in grade 2 or something like that.

The students up on top are laughing.

I was a very young child, and I had this great aunt. Whenever I would see her, she would say, "If you don't have your health, nothing else matters." I found it kind of very shocking, the way she would say it. I had no idea what she was talking about until many, many years later. I think that she was probably gone by the time I had figured out what she was trying to tell me. She was trying to say to me, "Take care of your health. Stay healthy. Don't smoke like I did"—because she was a smoker and she had that deep smoker's voice that we recognize when we speak to people sometimes.

Smoking is an issue, obviously. We're hearing many people address the smoking issue. Too often, for people who develop lung cancer, it's assumed, wrongly, that they were smokers. My own mother died, unfortunately,

of lung cancer. She never smoked. Madam Speaker, she couldn't even light a match. If it was my birthday cake and my friends were over, she couldn't light the match. She was afraid.

She didn't smoke. She never lived with anybody who smoked and she never worked with anybody who smoked. I don't know if it was radon, I don't know if it was genetics, but it was very painful, obviously, to watch and painful, obviously, for her to go through it—both painful for us to watch.

We do want to see health care providers have the ability to do what is in the best interests of the patients always. Yes, there are limitations, and we all know that, if only there were more money, we could do more. Well, there have been so many instances discussed in this Legislature and in the press in this province of where money really could have been better spent on health care. I think that sometimes the government feels that we bring up things like Ornge and gas plant cancellations and other scandals and even ongoing OPP investigations, which are costly. The money for—those investigations are costly, and it comes out of the public coffers. I think we can all agree that we're not here to just have those political partisan battles. What we're trying to draw attention to is, wouldn't that money have been far better spent on front-line health care in the province of Ontario?

Smoking is a problem, but there are other issues related to smoking, which include contraband tobacco. Contraband tobacco is a problem for law enforcement agencies in the province of Ontario for many reasons, but also it's a problem for anybody who is concerned about lung health, because contraband cigarettes are actually much more dangerous than regular cigarettes. They don't have proper filters and things like that—and the way the cigarettes are made. I would like to see contraband tobacco addressed here in the Legislature, not just for the reasons that we've discussed many times, but also how it addresses lung health.

I want to mention very quickly my uncle. We call him "Uncle Yankle." Yankle in Yiddish is Yaakov, which is Jacob. He had TB and he was in the sanatorium—he is now 92 years old—when he was about 18 years old. The reason he is still with us at the age of 92—even though he has many scars on his lungs and many challenges because of it—is because he took such excellent care of his health from then on, and also, obviously, was very lucky.

The Lung Association was with us yesterday to remind us again about many of their concerns, not just radon gas. Many of their advocates came down. I just want to show everybody, if I can, that they dropped off some thank-you cards that say, "Thank you. Breathe. The Lung Association. Together we will create breathing breakthroughs."

Here's an opportunity to create a breathing breakthrough.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale to wrap up.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I want to thank the members from Elgin–Middlesex–London, London West, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Parkdale–High Park, York–Simcoe and Thornhill, as well as the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Associate Minister of Education. Thank you all.

In a few moments, we'll be called upon to vote yea or nay on this bill. As we do so, let us remember, with thanksgiving, the enormous concern and dedicated work that have preceded this bill. It has been a long and winding road, as well as a tear-stained trek, that brought us to this place.

I have always believed that partnership is about achieving together the things that we are less likely to achieve apart. Passing this bill will, as Bobby Kennedy once said, let the word go forth from this place that we stand in solidarity in acknowledgement that we can recognize and someday entirely eradicate lung disease. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing to do?

In the immortal words of Cheri DiNovo, let's just do it. I think that's what you said, right? Let's just do it, Speaker.

Thanks very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time provided for private members' public business has expired

KATELYNN'S PRINCIPLE ACT
(DECISIONS AFFECTING
CHILDREN), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PRINCIPE
DE KATELYNN (DÉCISIONS
CONCERNANT DES ENFANTS)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will first deal with ballot number 22, standing in the name of Miss Taylor.

Miss Taylor has moved second reading of Bill 57, An Act to enshrine Katelynn's Principle as the guiding principle for decisions regarding children. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member about which committee.

Miss Monique Taylor: Justice policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Justice policy—agreed? Agreed.

AUDITOR GENERAL
AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LE VÉRIFICATEUR GÉNÉRAL

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Miller, Parry Sound–Muskoka, has moved second reading of Bill 67, An Act to amend the Auditor General Act with

respect to public contractors. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Now, I'm going to turn to the member about the committee.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, legislative assembly, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Legislative assembly—agreed? Agreed. Congratulations.

LUNG HEALTH ACT, 2016
LOI DE 2016 SUR
LA SANTÉ PULMONAIRE

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. McMeekin has moved second reading of Bill 71, An Act to establish the Lung Health Advisory Council and develop a provincial action plan respecting lung disease. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to look to the member to see which committee.

Mr. Ted McMeekin: I move that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I heard the member say the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Carried? Carried.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

BUILDING ONTARIO UP
FOR EVERYONE ACT
(BUDGET MEASURES), 2016
LOI DE 2016 VISANT À FAVORISER
L'ESSOR DE L'ONTARIO POUR TOUS
(MESURES BUDGÉTAIRES)

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

Bill 70, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes / Projet de loi 70, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter et à modifier diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to stand up in this House and speak to Bill 70, Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act (Budget Measures), 2016.

Let me just start by saying that we are committed to balancing the budget by 2017-18. We are also incorporating new commitments into our plan to make everyday life easier for the people of Ontario.

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At the same time, we are managing spending. In fact, this year's public accounts show that we beat our annual deficit target again, for the seventh year in a row. We

have held growth in program spending over the past four years, without making cuts to services or raising taxes.

Madam Speaker, I want to take a moment to speak to municipal elections, which are a part of this bill. Some of my colleagues in this House may remember that I introduced a bill a few years ago, asking to make the chair of York region elected by popular vote rather than appointed by the members of the regional council.

My bill died on the order paper. Then Minister Helena Jaczek introduced a bill, and of course, during election 2014, that bill also died on the order paper. Then Minister Chris Ballard introduced that bill, and I'm so happy to see that that bill is incorporated with Bill 70.

We are proposing that the head of council of every regional municipality in the province of Ontario, except for Oxford county, be elected by voters, beginning with the 2018 municipal election, through changes to the Municipal Act, 2001. Oxford county is excluded because it would require having to create an additional position, and its chair is appointed from among the democratically elected members of its council.

Madam Speaker, if passed, this proposal would help to ensure that heads of regional councils are democratically elected and accountable to the voters they represent. We are proposing to strengthen democratic representation at the local level by requiring the heads of regional municipal councils to be elected. Currently, heads of regional municipal councils may either be directly elected or appointed by members of regional councils. This proposal would require all heads of regional councils in the province of Ontario, except Oxford county, to be directly elected, to strengthen democratic representation at the local level.

This amendment to the Municipal Act, 2001, was introduced through the Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act (Budget Measures), 2016, to help ensure that affected municipalities will have sufficient time to prepare for this change for the 2018 municipal election.

Unlike the other regional municipalities, Oxford's head of council is appointed from among the democratically elected members of its council, and it is not a separate seat that could be directly elected.

Madam Speaker, I want to take a moment again to talk about our economic growth.

Continued economic growth is helping our province to keep on track to balance. For the first half of 2016, Ontario posted stronger GDP growth than Canada, the United States of America and almost all other G7 countries. Moody's has upgraded our credit rating, showing confidence in our government's plan to grow the economy and create jobs. A growing economy and new jobs are the best way to support Ontario families and to generate revenues that will keep us on the path to balance and long-term prosperity for our people.

Business investments in Ontario increased by 0.6% in the second quarter of 2016 and by 0.9% in the first quarter. At the same time, Ontario's labour market continues to grow. Ontario has recovered all of the jobs lost during the recession. Over 640,000 jobs have been

created since the recession, the majority of which are full-time and private sector. The current unemployment rate in our province is 6.4%, under the national unemployment rate of 7%. Our unemployment rate has been lower than the national average for the past 18 months in a row, and it is the lowest unemployment rate in eight years.

Madam Speaker, we are amending the Pension Benefits Act to clarify the entitlements to portability of pension benefits and to give the Superintendent of Financial Services the authority to impose financial penalties in the pension sector.

Consistent with the budget commitment, changes to the Securities Act to protect employees from reprisals for providing information to regulators took effect on June 28, 2016. These legislative changes, which support the Ontario Securities Commission's newly launched whistleblower program, will strengthen the OSC's enforcement capacity, which is important for investor protection and maintaining confidence in capital markets. They will assist the OSC in accessing information about matters such as illegal insider trading, accounting and disclosure violations, and registrant misconduct that would otherwise be difficult to obtain.

We are implementing certain recommendations in the November 2015 report submitted by the Minister of Finance's former parliamentary assistant Hon. Laura Albanese:

- to allow Ontario credit unions to participate in syndicated loans outside Ontario;
- to remove differential rules for small credit unions; and
- to authorize regulations setting out different deposit insurance limits for different insurable deposits.

The MOF parliamentary assistant at that time, Minister Albanese now, completed a review of Credit Unions and Caisses Populaires Act, 1994, in November 2015. The recommendations were based on extensive public consultations and aim to ensure that Ontario's framework continues to protect consumers, is aligned with international best practices and enables credit unions to meet the evolving needs of their members.

The government intends to implement on an expedited basis the key recommendations that address priorities for the sectors, such as:

- changing the deposit insurance limits to \$250,000;
- permitting credit unions to wholly own insurance brokerage subsidiaries; and
- removing differential rules for small credit unions.

The Minister of Finance is leading a working group of the Deposit Insurance Corp. and the Financial Services Commission of Ontario to implement these recommendations in a timely manner.

Promoting a modern regulatory framework for credit unions supports our government's plan to strengthen the financial services sector, which includes taking a modern and flexible approach to regulation and enhancing consumer and investor protection.

Thank you, Speaker, and I would like to share my remaining time with Minister Damerla, please.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Minister Damerla.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Thank you, Speaker. Might I say that it's very nice to see you in the Chair.

I just want to begin by saying that I've heard the opposition, both the NDP and the PC Party, very often criticize our economic plan, criticize this government's economic recovery and, generally, also criticize our latest FES, which was the latest update on the economy. But there is a third party that puts the lie to all of their allegations that the Ontario economy isn't performing well, and that happens to be a rating agency.

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If I were to ask my constituents in Mississauga, "Who would you believe—the partisanship shown by the opposition or an independent third party like Moody's, which has a stellar reputation when it comes to judging how well an economy is doing?"—I would suggest to Ontarians and my residents, my constituents in Mississauga: Don't take my word for it, because I know I'm a Liberal MPP, and don't take the word of a Conservative MPP or an NDP MPP; why don't you just go to a reputable third party, which is Moody's?

What is Moody's saying, Mr. Speaker? Well, guess what? Despite all of the negativity that we hear from the PC Party and the NDP about Ontario's economy and this government's management of the economy, the fact is that Moody's has just upgraded Ontario's credit rating. I think that gives a really balanced picture and really shines a light on what is actually taking place—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): A point of order from the honourable member—

Mr. Ted Arnott: From Wellington-Halton Hills. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I hesitate to interrupt, but I think I heard the minister responsible for seniors utter an unparliamentary remark. She used the word "lie," and I would ask her whether or not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Your point is well taken. I would respectfully ask the minister to please withdraw and then continue.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I withdraw. I did not mean it in that sense. It was an idiom that I used. But I respect the institution of this Legislature and the conventions that we use.

Anyway, just continuing along that line, I do believe that all of us as Ontarians, if we can just take our partisan hats off for a moment, can all take pride in the fact that Moody's, a very well-reputed credit-rating agency, now has positive news for the Ontario economy.

This is really a reflection of hard-working Ontarians, because governments can only lay the environment, lay the landscape, set the parameters, but in the end it is everyday Ontarians, hard-working Ontarians, who run this economy, and I want to give credit where it's due. I want to say "well done" to all of Ontario: Well done, Ontarians. We can all take much pride.

Even as we recognize that Ontario's economy is recovering and is doing very well, especially relative to our peers, I also recognize the fact that everyday families still feel stress. Will tomorrow be as good as today? Part of it is just the fast-changing landscape and environment that we live in. Technology has always changed our lives, but I think that today technology is changing our lives at speeds that have never been seen before. All of us across this planet are seeing technological innovations that are very disruptive and that are constantly changing how we work, where we work and the nature of our jobs. With that, there is no question, Mr. Speaker, that all of us feel anxious.

That is why this government recognizes that everyday Ontarians, like all of us, are looking for a slice of security in an inherently insecure world. That is why, in this particular bill, which we are calling the Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act, a big part of it is our commitment to what we call an inclusive economy: quite simply, an economy where no one is left behind.

That is why one measure that I am very, very pleased with is the fact that we are trying to make housing more affordable for first-time buyers. That is why we have made changes such that, for a first-time homebuyer, we are increasing the maximum refund on the land transfer tax from \$2,000 to \$4,000. We are restricting this refund to people who are Canadian citizens or permanent residents.

I think all of us in this Legislature can remember the time when we were trying to save up for our first house. I remember my own experience, where I was so grateful that we were buying a house. I remember that my husband had booked this house—it was still to be built—just from the plans. We had no idea what it would actually look like, but we were just so grateful and pleased that we had been able to save up the down payment for it. We didn't really care how big, how small, or what it looked like. We were just delighted that we were going to have our own piece of land and home. I also remember the excitement with which we would go to see the construction and see it come alive.

There's something very special about that first home. I think it really sets us on that path of adulthood, because once you buy that first home you really feel that you've entered the adult world. It's a moment of sobering responsibility but also immense joy and excitement. So we are really, really pleased as a government about this initiative that now makes homes just a little bit more affordable for Ontarians.

The other piece that I am very excited about that this bill includes—the Minister of Research and Innovation spoke to it and he has been a leader and a champion—is bringing greater democracy to Ontario. That is, specifically, moving from selecting a chair by city councillors to electing a chair. It is just a fantastic move. I'm very supportive of it. I think the residents of Peel, the residents of Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon deserve a chair that they have directly elected—across Ontario, of course, but what I mean is particularly in my region I'm a

big champion. I do believe that given all the alternatives, democracy is the best form of government, and I'm very, very pleased that now we are finally moving in this direction. In 2018 we will be, for the very first time, electing a chair directly.

I think this is really important, because when I start to look at the services that are delivered at that municipal level, what I find is that a significant number of services that I, as a Mississauga resident, receive are not necessarily delivered by the city of Mississauga but actually by the region of Peel. Services that are very, very key to me, whether it's picking up garbage, just as an example, are actually delivered by the region of Peel. They have a huge budget, so it's only right in a democracy that that level of government is also elected by the will of Ontarians. I'm very delighted to see this significant piece of modernization taking place.

Another piece, Mr. Speaker, that I want to speak to is interest arbitration. A major issue in our interest arbitration system is the length of time it takes to reach an arbitrator's award in the fire sector. Both sides are not happy with it—not our firefighters, many of whom I know were here yesterday, and I just want to do a shout-out to firefighters across Ontario for the amazing work they do. Neither the municipalities nor the firefighters are well-served in a system where an average hearing is 42 months. One of the things that this bill will be doing is moving to work to improve expediency and accountability in the interest arbitration process in the fire sector.

If you go through the Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act, truly there is something for everyone in this act, whether you are an average Ontarian, whether you are a municipality, whether you are a firefighter. No matter which walk of life you are from, this bill truly touches the lives and helps improve the lives of Ontarians, all Ontarians, all sectors of Ontarians. Truly, the spirit of this bill, the spirit of the leadership that Premier Kathleen Wynne is showing, is really that we want to build up the economy. Moody's is saying we are doing a great job on that, but we also want to make sure that this growth is inclusive growth, that the rising tide lifts all boats up. That is the spirit behind this government, our government policies and, of course, this bill: that no one is left behind. That is what this party—this government—stands for.

I'm so proud to stand here and speak to this bill that does just a little bit more to help make Ontarians' lives just a little bit better, that understands the needs of Ontarians, understands and empathizes with the challenges that everyday Ontarians face that, frankly, I relate to because I'm an everyday Ontarian as well. I face the very same challenges, and I'm delighted that this bill goes some way in addressing those.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): For further questions and comments, I welcome the member from Whitby—Oshawa to offer his remarks.

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Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to speak to Bill 70, An Act to implement Budget measures—

Mrs. Gila Martow: No, it's questions and comments.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Oh, sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): The honourable member from York–Simcoe.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to offer a few comments at this time on Bill 70.

As many in the chamber will know, this also included the demise of the provincial pension plan. It's sort of interesting that it took this long, that from the very beginning it was something that was being offered, but then there were deadlines and then there were changes in its structure and so forth. But at the end of the day, the taxpayer, the most important person in this conversation, had to know that the government had spent \$70 million creating a structure that simply, like a house of cards, fell down. Then there was the post advertising bill, and that was almost a million dollars—\$800,000 this government spent to advertise something that no longer existed.

I think when you look at this isolated example of the government and its strategies, it's a demonstration of how poorly these plans are laid. The Premier defended her position by saying that it helped them at the pan-Canadian meeting that took place in June. I would question when it has become the responsibility of a provincial government to advertise on behalf of the federal government and to spend nearly \$1 million.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I thank the honourable member from York–Simcoe.

Further questions and comments? I offer the floor now to the member from Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, thank you. There's a lot in this bill that depends on legislators putting a lot of trust in the government delivering on what they say they'll deliver on, and that's a lot to ask. Recently, we had the example of the Minister of Finance promising great things to new homebuyers and modifying the land transfer tax. That flew until, frankly, the Premier shot him down and said that, really, we're going to give a very small amount. That begs the question: How much credibility can you put in a statement by a minister, or a promise?

On Tuesday, the Minister of the Environment promised to clean up mercury contamination in the community of Grassy Narrows. He promised to stop poisoning that people, stop poisoning that community with mercury.

Today that whole promise came crashing down when the Premier refused to back the minister up. Chief Fobister, who has repeatedly called for a cleanup of mercury contamination in the Grassy Narrows community, asked the Premier to put it in writing, but the Premier wouldn't do that. She wouldn't commit to a written agreement actually delivering on the promise made by the minister. She went back to the old explanations as to why Ontario wouldn't clean up the mercury poisoning that is damaging the people of Grassy Narrows.

Speaker, if the Premier won't stop the people of Grassy Narrows from being poisoned, if the Premier won't back up her minister when that minister promises

to stop the poisoning of that community, why should we believe that she will follow through on any promises?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I thank the member from Toronto–Danforth and now offer the floor to my neighbour to the south, Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise again to speak to this important piece of legislation. When I followed Minister Sousa during the leadoff remarks, I spoke a lot about why I'm here. I talked about how I'm here and we're all here because we're entrusted with the role and the responsibility of making people's lives better every day.

When I look at this bill, I think this is one of those bills that has a lot of elements that will make a lot of people's lives a lot better across our province, including in my riding of Etobicoke Centre.

The members opposite raised a few issues, and I'll try to address them briefly. One was on the land transfer tax. I was at a meeting with Minister Sousa recently where a young person raised their hand and thanked the minister for doing what he did on the land transfer tax to help make those initial costs, in particular for young people, more manageable when they go to buy their first home. So I disagree with the member from Toronto–Danforth that it's not a meaningful and important step. I think this is something that is a step in the right direction for young people, and young people have told me just that.

The member from Toronto–Danforth questioned the credibility—questioned whether we can trust the minister. I have the opportunity to work with Minister Sousa almost every day, really, as his parliamentary assistant, and I have to tell you that this is a man of great integrity and strength of character. I strongly challenge the member from Toronto–Danforth in the suggestion that the minister cannot be trusted. I think he's a man of exemplary talent, skill and credibility, and he's doing a wonderful job, as our Minister of Finance, in meeting our fiscal targets and is working hard to make sure we're managing our money more wisely.

The last thing I'll say, to the member who raised the issue around the ORPP: The CPP enhancement is an excellent outcome, but it wouldn't have happened without the leadership of our provincial government. The fact that our provincial government was willing to move forward was critical in ensuring that the other provinces made this a priority, that the federal government made this a priority, and ultimately that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I thank the member from Etobicoke Centre.

Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today and add my comments to what basically ends up being an omnibus bill. It's supposed to be the fall economic statement, but there are all these quirky little things in there, just sort of thrown in. It's kind of like when you have leftovers in your fridge and you're trying to make supper, and you make a stew and you just throw everything in.

I'm going to address the issue of elected officials in the regions, specifically York region. We've had a few

private members' bills put forward to ask for an elected chair since I've been here in the Legislature. It was the minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy who last put forward a bill calling for an elected chair of York region.

For those who don't understand: York region is comprised of six municipalities—six cities—with six mayors, regional councillors and local councillors. From among those mayors, local councillors and regional councillors, they elect somebody not already elected—not one of the regional councillors or anything like that; somebody who's non-elected—to be the chair, and it's a very powerful position, as you can imagine.

I signed the letter that the minister asked me to sign, which he publicized, saying that I supported his initiative, but then here he is in government, and it did not go to committee, let alone go to amendments and to further debate, and it's kind of embarrassing for me. So I just want to say that I'm glad that we're moving forward somehow—even if it's a bit of an omnibus bill—to ensure that our elected officials are indeed accountable and that the York region chair is in fact an elected position—which, actually, many people in York region assume to be the case and don't realize that it isn't.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): For our final response, the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science.

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from York-Simcoe, the member from Toronto-Danforth, the member from Etobicoke Centre and my neighbour the member from Thornhill for their comments.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 70, Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act (Budget Measures), 2016, is a unique bill in the sense that it stresses the point that we will balance our budget by 2017-18.

My colleague the honourable member from Thornhill also alluded to the election of the chairs of regions in the province of Ontario. When it comes to York region, this is a municipality of about one million people—a municipality larger than any Atlantic province, in terms of population. It consists of nine cities—nine smaller municipalities—and still, in this larger municipality with a population of one million, with a \$2-billion budget and a \$3-billion debt, the person who oversees the operation and the management of this municipality is appointed, while the office is a public office and, in reality, the person who holds that office must be elected. Based on this bill, if passed, in 2018, for the first time in the history of York region, the chair of York region will be elected. In the whole province of Ontario, for all regional municipalities—except the county of Oxford—their chair will be elected by a popular vote.

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By passing this bill, this Legislature will bring more democracy to our municipal governments, which is much needed. Of course, that's what the public asked for, and I'm glad that we managed, through this bill, to introduce that very point. Hopefully, after passing this bill—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I thank the honourable Minister of Research, Innovation and Science.

For further debate, I invite the member from Whitby-Oshawa.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to speak to Bill 70, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact and amend various statutes. I do so from my experience as a senior civil servant with the Ministry of Revenue and from the perspective I've gained in my role as the official opposition critic for advanced education and skills development. It's a portfolio that I've immersed myself in since I was elected in February 2016. I've heard a lot about the challenges facing our universities, colleges and skilled trades sector, while visiting over 30 campuses and trade organizations across the province.

By taking a comprehensive look at the state of advanced education and skills development, you certainly get a clearer sense of where we are as a province. The minds being educated today will, in fact, shape the economic fortunes of tomorrow. There's no question that, during my tour, I heard far and wide about the skills gap that exists in our province, one which the government has failed to address yet again in Bill 70.

Every failed policy decision that this government has made over the last 13 years continues to make life harder and more unaffordable for Ontarians, and no economic statement is going to change that. Quite frankly, the government's omnibus legislation is simply a distraction and has nothing to do with improving the economic well-being of Ontarians.

In order to balance the budget in 2017 and 2018, the fall economic statement indicates the government has reduced its contingency reserve by \$600 million and is seeking another \$800 million through the one-time sale of government assets. The government has no plan to get our books back on track that doesn't involve higher taxes or hydro rates, more fire sales of government assets or cuts to front-line services.

Let's turn for a moment and take a look at the broad macroeconomic numbers. The government's rosy rhetoric in the statement notes that the provincial economy is now growing and that relatively strong growth is expected in the years to come. But it's important to recognize just how severe and prolonged Ontario's economic slump has been before popping the champagne to celebrate a brief uptick in growth.

Speaker, consider that, from 2003 to 2015, per-person economic growth, adjusting for inflation, in Ontario increased on an average annual rate of 0.5%. That's anemic growth over a long period of time, and is approximately half the growth rate in the rest of Canada.

Weak economic growth is not just a matter of economic concern. It has hit Ontario families hard in the pocketbook. Consider, Speaker, that in 2000, average disposable household income in Ontario was 10% higher than in the rest of the country. Prolonged poor economic performance has meant that Ontario's average income since 2012 is now below the rest of the country. It's below the rest of the country.

Ontarians having income below the national average is historically unthinkable and probably quite difficult for those who are watching this afternoon to comprehend. Put simply, the average Ontarian is now poorer than the average Canadian.

A potent symbol of Ontario's economic slide came in 2009, when the province became eligible for equalization payments, becoming a have-not province for the first time in its history. It's a situation that would have been almost unimaginable a generation ago. Seven years later, however, the receipt of equalization payments has simply become business as usual in Ontario. What's clear is it will take more than a few quarters, even a few years, of strong economic growth to undo all of this damage and restore Ontario as an economic engine in Canada.

Speaker, if this is what economic success and a working plan look like, it's hard to imagine what might constitute failure in the government's eyes. If the government's willingness to brag about its economic record is cringeworthy, its willingness to brag about the success of its management of provincial finances is almost surreal.

The economic update says the province is on track to beat its deficit target this year, and that it will return to a balanced budget in 2017-18. This is supposed to be evidence of the government's prudent fiscal management. The numbers themselves, however, tell a very different story. In reality, the government is on track this year to run its ninth consecutive multi-billion-dollar budget deficit. Since 2003, Ontario's debt, after adjusting for financial assets, has grown faster than any other province's in Canada.

Speaker, the government may well finally balance its budget next year, which includes its spending on day-to-day items, although its own Financial Accountability Office has cast some doubt that it will. Even so, the government will continue to rack up debt in the years ahead. In fact, the Financial Accountability Officer projects that the government's debt burden will increase by more than \$50 billion in the years ahead, reaching \$370 billion by 2020.

Speaker, the notion that a return to an artificial balanced budget next year means the fiscal plan is working or that Ontario's battered finances are on the road to recovery is, frankly, nothing more than spin.

The rosy fiscal and economic rhetoric surrounding last week's economic update is disconnected from the economic realities facing Ontarians and from the realities of the government's own finances.

Speaker, I look at the land transfer tax changes, as an example, and I see nothing more than a distraction tactic. We've heard in this House that we have a major housing crisis in so many Ontario municipalities. And while it may be appealing for first-time buyers in some parts of Ontario to receive a credit prior to closing, there are more critical housing issues that should be addressed. The land transfer tax benefit for first-time purchasers is offset in part by an increase in that same tax on wealthier purchasers.

A senior economist at BMO Nesbitt Burns has said that doubling the rebate will do little for purchasers in Toronto, where skyrocketing values have made it all but impossible for first-time purchasers to contemplate. With runaway home prices in Toronto, the rebates will not create the incentive necessary for the first-time buyers that the amendment is intending to assist.

Speaker, every day—and I'm sure you do, as well—I receive notes from my constituents and other concerned Ontario residents about the energy crisis in this province. These stories are heart-wrenching: people having to choose between keeping the lights on or basic necessities. Hard-working Ontario families are choosing to pay for food over their hydro bills. They simply have no money left to spare.

Businesses are either leaving Ontario or electing to expand operations in other jurisdictions, in large part because of the burdensome red tape, and certainly because the energy costs are crippling production.

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But this omnibus legislation does nothing to address the single largest economic issue in this province, and that's runaway energy prices. This omission highlights the simple fact that this government is out of touch with the demands of Ontario residents.

This omnibus bill amends 27 statutes, repeals three and enacts four new ones. But what's particularly glaring is the incredibly stark reality that only a minimal number of the changes actually impact the economics of Ontario.

I fail to understand how a government purportedly intent on getting our economic engine moving again can take any comfort from the directions and content of Bill 70. I fail to see why the government thinks that the residents of this province will be supportive of amendments to the Assessment Act or the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act, or the creation of the Interim Appropriation for 2017-2018 Act. They can't pay their hydro bills. They can't afford basic necessities. They face enormous obstacles in having their aging parents obtain affordable assisted living. Furthermore, their children are finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs. These are some of the real issues, not a tweak to the Commodity Futures Act.

This government must get a grip on the realities facing the average man or woman in our province. When you step back, Bill 70 seems to have been created in a vacuum, far removed from appreciating the everyday stresses faced by each of us every single day.

Speaker, as I said at the outset of my speech, I spent months visiting universities, community colleges and career colleges across Ontario, and I listened and I learned. For too long, Ontario has allowed its investment in universities to fall behind, and for six consecutive years, Ontario has ranked last of all the provinces for per-student funding. In fact, adjusted for inflation, Ontario's per-student funding is now at its lowest point since the government began building capacity and expanding access in the 1960s.

The ongoing review of the university funding formula must produce results that will improve the stability and

adequacy of funding. Risky proposals for unproven and inequitable performance funding schemes must be rejected. For students and faculty already feeling the squeeze produced by misallocated funding, it's crucial that any revised model prioritizes accessible and high-quality education.

Years of inappropriate public investment—over \$1 billion wasted on gas plants comes to mind—is threatening universities' ability to fulfill their core missions of teaching and research at the highest standard. A re-commitment to appropriate application of public funding for Ontario universities is the only path forward for ensuring high-quality post-secondary education across Ontario.

This legislation also does nothing to mend the skills gap, which continues to spiral out of control in this province under this government's watch. It continues to grow, and all the government can say is that they're conducting another review. Speaker, this government has had 13 years to conduct reviews.

Parents in Ontario want to know that their sons and daughters can leave university, community college or an apprenticeship with a real opportunity to start a career. They want to know that when their son or daughter is attending school or is within an apprenticeship, they're able to translate these new skills and knowledge into a career of their choice. Yet we hear from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce that the skills gap is costing our economy \$24.3 billion a year, and \$3.7 billion in forgone tax revenue. It's time for this government to take real action and stop graduating people for yesterday's jobs.

But it's not just higher education where this government is earning a failing grade. We also see it in our primary and secondary schools. Half of Ontario's grade 6 students are failing to meet the provincial standards for mathematics, and there are 33 school boards in our province, as I stand here today, that are below the provincial average for math between 2014 and 2016. But instead of dealing with the issues of education, the government creates Bill 70.

The people of Ontario want the government to take positive action on the economy, undertaking initiatives that will assist them in improving their lives. The people of Ontario want this province to be a great place to raise a family and the best place to live, and Bill 70 does very little to address the serious economic issues like hydro and education. We do not support the economic policies of this government, and we certainly do not support Bill 70.

We have a debt crisis in our once-great province. Ontario now is the single most indebted subsovereign borrower in the world. That is such an incredible statement to have to make. We have twice the debt of California. The Financial Accountability Officer has confirmed the province's net debt is set to rise by over \$64 billion by 2020-21 to a record \$370 billion, and that Ontario will continue to be the largest subnational borrower on the planet.

This government spends more than \$11 billion a year in interest on the debt alone, which is money that we

could be investing in our province's future. That amounts to more, every year, paying interest on our debt than we do on post-secondary funding. We spend more every year serving a debt than we do on post-secondary education in this province. We're quite literally making future generations pay for the mistakes of this government's fiscal imprudence and reckless approach to governing. It's outrageous, and quite clearly, the public has grown tired of it.

Yet despite racking up all this debt, the government claims it is going to balance the budget right before the election. As my colleague the member of provincial Parliament for Nipissing rightly points out, it's an artificial balance. Earlier this year, the Financial Accountability Officer told us that the government is using the one-time money from asset sales and contingency funds to artificially balance the budget in an election year. This government seems intent on balancing the budget on the backs of Ontario taxpayers by selling the valued assets of the province to prop up a balance sheet that has become unsupportable.

Now, Speaker, I know you have heard me speak about how this government has no comprehensive or coherent legislative agenda. In fact, I was just mentioning this very point to Cody Welton, a member of our House leader's staff, as I entered the chamber this afternoon. But the government has had 13 years to get it right, and in my estimation, they have failed. They have failed the hard-working people of Ontario, and they've left a wake of scandal, waste and mismanagement in their path; a sea of mistakes. But what's clear is that as the clock runs out on this government, one can only hope they will look in the mirror, dig deep and put forward some comprehensive policies to help take this province off the dire course they have set, though at the end of the day, I won't be holding my breath.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure to rise on behalf of my constituents in London West to respond to the remarks from the member for Whitby–Oshawa. I listened closely to his speech and appreciate the issues he raised about post-secondary education. I am also the post-secondary education critic for the Ontario NDP caucus, and we have long pointed out the issues around skyrocketing tuition which is making post-secondary education unaffordable for students. Yes, we know that the Liberals have made some changes to student financial assistance, but the reality is that students are graduating with huge debt loads. There's an average \$28,000 in debt for undergraduates, who have to borrow money to attend university, and \$35,000 worth of debt for graduate students who attend university.

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When the government is proposing this doubling of the land transfer tax refund as a way to get first-time homebuyers into the market, you have to ask: Who are these first-time homebuyers? Well, these are university students, post-secondary education students, who are

carrying these huge debt loads. Many of them have young families. They're also looking at the cost of child care, which is becoming increasingly unaffordable for families across this province. When you add to that hydro bills, which in some cases are as much as people's monthly rent payments—when you look at the combined burden of all of these sources of revenue pressures, what the Liberals are proposing in this bill is going to do very, very little to enable first-time homebuyers to enter the job market.

Much more has to be done to help get young people on their feet financially in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's a pleasure to rise and to join the debate on this important piece of legislation. I just wanted to respond to a few of the issues that have been raised by the members opposite over the last few moments.

I keep hearing from the members of the Conservative caucus—and we heard it from the member from Nipissing yesterday—this idea of artificial balance. The budget is going to be balanced by 2017-18. Our government committed to that. We committed to that during the campaign. We committed to that since then. We've retained that commitment, and it's going to happen. There's nothing artificial about it. When the accounting practices that we use are those that are accepted, and we apply those to the finances of the province, you'll see that the budget is balanced. I don't think there's anything artificial about that.

The second thing I would say is that there's a lot of commentary about the amount we're paying in interest. Certainly, we want to make sure that as many of our resources as possible are going towards program spending.

But I want to put this in perspective. Interest on debt right now is 8.9% of the provincial budget. What's interesting is that when the NDP was in power, it was actually 12% of the provincial budget. But—wait for it—when the PCs were in office, it was 14% of the provincial budget. So for the PCs to talk about how our interest costs are high—they should really look at themselves in the mirror on how they mismanaged the provincial finances.

The other thing I want to talk about is, they keep talking about subnational debt and how we're one of the largest subnational borrowers. In a comparison of subnational jurisdictions, it's really a comparison of apples to oranges, because provinces are responsible for much more than US states are and other subnational jurisdictions. Ontario's budget is bigger than California's, despite having one third of the population of California, so it stands to reason that a province would have a greater debt load than a state.

I just wanted to respond to those points, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Mr. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: First of all, I'd like to thank the very hard-working member from Whitby—

Oshawa. I'm so glad he touched on so many dark areas with this bill.

I quote what he said: "In order to balance the budget in 2017 and 2018, the fall economic statement indicates the government has reduced its contingency reserve by \$600 million and is seeking another \$800 million through the one-time sale of government assets." He expressed concern about more fire sales of government assets. I heard this many, many times, especially from the NDP side. They're really concerned about the selling off of Hydro One and that the Liberal government will try to paint a rosy picture.

Our MPP from Whitby—Oshawa—I totally agree that the 13 years of Liberal scandal, waste and mismanagement created over \$300 billion, and they spent more than \$11 billion a year only to pay for the interest. With that kind of money, we don't have to close 600 schools in Ontario. In my riding alone, the three Catholic schools will be closed. It's just unimaginable. Another school just south of the border, Brookside, has already closed, and developers are building condos. With this total mismanagement and now that the schools are closed, the developers are building condos. How are we going to educate our young children?

We need a change in this government.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: This morning, I was one of the lucky panellists at the ISARC meeting where the focus really was on poverty, as it has been every year since I've been here, for 10 years. There were some very interesting facts put out, to the member from Whitby—Oshawa's points, about just how our tax base has changed. They were put out in part by none other than Senator Art Eggleton—

Interjection: Eggleton.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: —Eggleton; sorry—who is, or was, certainly, before he became an independent senator, a Liberal. He talked about the falling rate of corporate taxation. It used to be around 29%, and we're now taxing corporations at less than half that, for those who actually pay taxes. He talked about how the wealthy among us in Ontario, and Canada, for that matter, pay now 40% less in taxes than they did 50 years ago.

That lack of taxation upon those who can pay has a real impact upon those who have needs. Those who have needs, we heard from Campaign 2000 this morning, are children. They're children. We should be ashamed of ourselves, in a jurisdiction as wealthy as Ontario, that one in five children under the age of six live in poverty—and by poverty, we're talking about dire poverty—and one in seven under the age of 18. Of course, they're not in poverty by themselves. Mainly and mostly, this is also an issue of women's poverty.

That is the state of this Ontario. There's nothing good about that scenario. We're leading into Christmas. This is almost a Dickensian scenario.

We, as legislators, and this government in particular, which has the power, need to step up. ISARC ended up

by calling for another billion dollars—another billion dollars—to be put towards the needs of the neediest. I say, “Right on.” It’s not in this bill, and it should be.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member for Whitby–Oshawa to wrap up.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I always appreciate the passion and comments from the members of the Legislature because it’s a very important issue, obviously, when you’re talking about the economic realities of this province and the challenges within that.

To some of the earlier points that were made about the artificial balance: Again, the Financial Accountability Officer told us that the government is using one-time money from asset sales and contingency funds to artificially balance the budget. Part of that is related to the enormous debt that I spoke to that’s accumulating year in and year out. It’s just simply intolerable. We’re quite literally, as some of the colleagues have already pointed out, making future generations pay for the mistakes of this government’s fiscal imprudence and, quite frankly, reckless approach to government. It’s outrageous. The public has really grown tired of it. You hear it every day. I hear it every day. I know the government members hear it every day—particularly the high hydro rates.

You turn to the bill again, and it has 27 statutes in it. It repeals three and enacts four new ones. But again, at the end of the day, Speaker—and I know the day has been long—the reality is that only a minimal number of the changes within this legislation actually impact the economy and economics of the province of Ontario and do anything at all to improve the lives of hard-working families here in Ontario.

Thank you, Speaker. Thank you for your patience. It’s always a pleasure to speak to you.

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The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate? I recognize the member from Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s Thursday afternoon. I appreciate your tenacity and your resilience in getting through this day.

I have the opportunity to speak to Bill 70. I have to note that I will be borrowing extensively from our critic, Catherine Fife, who had an opportunity in the very recent past to do her one-hour leadoff.

She spoke about this bill, the Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act (Budget Measures), and she noted right at the start the efforts made by the Minister of Finance, Mr. Sousa, to put out a very good news story about the big break that was going to be given to new first-time homebuyers in this province. It’s something that actually didn’t last very long. The Premier went into damage control, came out and said, “Listen, don’t get your hopes up.” I have to say, the Premier was right: Don’t get your hopes up. There’s not a lot of money here.

When I was doing scrums on this a few days ago, I was asked, “Don’t you think that giving people an extra \$2,000 break on a half-a-million-dollar house is going to

make a big difference?” I have to say, Speaker—and you represent a Toronto riding as well—that although \$2,000 is something that people will accept—that there is not going to be a whole bunch of people saying, “No, on principle, I won’t accept it”—when you’re laying out \$400,000, \$500,000 or \$700,000 for a new house, it doesn’t change a lot of the picture. It just doesn’t. Frankly, even if you’re buying an extraordinarily small, shoebox-sized condo at \$250,000 or \$350,000, the \$2,000 doesn’t change the economics an awful lot.

I want to say, before I get into the heart of the bill, that I’ll be primarily focusing on schedules 16 and 17, because they are of great consequence to worker safety here in the province of Ontario. There are a number of legal opinions and research evidence that I’ll be addressing to show how wrong this government is in the direction that it’s taking in those schedules. In fact, it’s becoming a regular part of our job as legislators to go on at length about the weaknesses of legislation brought forward by this government.

Like my colleague Catherine Fife, I want to thank Cindy Forster, the MPP for Welland and our labour critic. Although she has not been able to be with us as much as she has wanted to, she and her office have been extraordinarily helpful in doing the background research on this bill.

Speaker, this is an omnibus bill. For everyone in this House, we’re all familiar with the just criticism, the accurate criticism, that was levelled against the Harper government for its rule by omnibus bill. Because when you have an omnibus bill that is supposed to be addressing financial matters and also restructures how regional chairs are selected in regional municipalities, it’s hard to find a coherent thread through all of that. This is one of those bills: an omnibus bill—or an “ominous bill”—that throws together a whole bunch of different issues, some of which do not reside well with the other.

You’ll remember that the first iteration of this bill, the Building Ontario Up Act, came after 2014 as part of a budget measures act. After prorogation, something we went through recently, this was changed to become the Building Ontario Up for Everyone Act.

What’s interesting, and I had a chance to allude to this earlier, is that for the most part what this bill does is it sets up regulatory frameworks into which the government will pour regulations that won’t come back here for debate, won’t come back here for examination and won’t come back here for any sort of sober second thought as to whether or not they will actually fulfill the needs of the people of this province. Quite simply put, transparency is deeply lacking in this bill.

Now, my colleague Catherine Fife had the opportunity to be briefed by ministry staff on the bill and the wide permutations of issues that were covered, and she was very appreciative—not that they could answer every question she had, but they did their jobs professionally, and for that she and all of us should be quite grateful.

I want to start, before I get into the labour-related sections, talking about schedule 18, the Ontario Retire-

ment Pension Plan Legislation Repeal Act, 2016. Finally, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act is repealed. It proposes to dissolve the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan. It's fascinating, Speaker, to note that the day this act came out was the same day that the CBC revealed the Liberals had announced that the ORPP was done, that their work had been successful. They'd made sure that the Liberal government at the federal level had done what they said they were going to do, and I have to say, Speaker, that is a full-time job for anyone—not just the opposition in Ottawa but a full-time job for those of us in the Legislature, because as you are well aware, there are many, many things that have been promised that have not come to fruition.

The same day that happened, the CBC had an opportunity to report that even after the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan was cancelled, this government spent \$793,000 more on commercials. Now, I don't know about your riding, Speaker, and I don't know about the ridings of others in this chamber, but more than three quarters of a million dollars would have done very well in quite a few of our ridings in terms of addressing things like homelessness, lack of work, inadequate child care or wait-lists for hospitals. Three quarters of a million dollars wouldn't solve all the problems of all the ridings in this province, but to waste it when the needs are so severe in so many of our ridings, with so many of our people, is not something that can be excused.

The centre of things that I want to discuss are schedules 16 and 17. Schedule 16 genuinely caught a lot of people off guard when it came forward. Schedule 16 amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to allow the Chief Prevention Officer to accredit a health and safety management system, according to the standards set out by the Chief Prevention Officer. I want to talk to you about why that's so important, Speaker.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I have been asked to move adjournment of debate by my—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. Mr. Tabuns has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear yes. Is it carried? Carried.

Second reading debate adjourned.

CONSIDERATION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Orders of the day? I recognize the member from Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe that you will find we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Do we have agreement? Yes.

Member from Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I move that the order of the House dated September 29, 2016, referring Bill 9, An Act to amend the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care Act,

to the Standing Committee on Social Policy be discharged; and

That the order of the House dated October 27, 2016, referring Bill 47, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 with respect to rewards points, to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy be discharged; and

That both Bills 9 and 47 be instead referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills; and

That the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills be authorized to meet from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, November 29, 2016, for public hearings on Bill 47 and from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills be authorized to meet from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Wednesday, November 30, 2016, for public hearings on Bill 34, An Act to amend the Children's Law Reform Act with respect to the relationship between a child and the child's grandparents, and from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills be authorized to meet from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursday, December 1, 2016, for public hearings on Bill 9, and from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bills 9, 34 and 47:

Notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

That the deadline for requests to appear at public hearings on Bill 47 be noon on Monday, November 28, 2016; and

That the deadline for requests to appear at public hearings on Bill 34 be noon on Tuesday, November 29, 2016; and

That the deadline for requests to appear at public hearings on Bill 9 be noon on Wednesday, November 30, 2016; and

That the Clerk of the Committee provide a list of all interested presenters to the subcommittee by 1 p.m. on the day of the deadline for requests to appear for each of Bills 9, 34 and 47; and

That the Clerk of the Committee be authorized to schedule all interested presenters if all requests received by the deadline can be accommodated; and

That each member of the subcommittee or their designate provide the Clerk of the Committee a prioritized list of presenters chosen from the Clerk's list should the number of requests exceed the number of time slots available by 4 p.m. on the day of the deadline for requests to appear; and

That each witness receive up to four minutes for their presentation, followed by six minutes for questions from committee members; and

That the committee may agree to allow presenters greater time for presentations in the event public hearings are undersubscribed on that day; and

That the deadline for written submissions be 5 p.m. on the day of the public hearings on Bill 9, 34 and 47; and

That the committee shall report Bills 9, 34 and 47 to the House by no later than Monday, December 5, 2016; and

That in the event that the committee fails to report any of the bills on that day, such bills shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

That upon receiving the support of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills, the Speaker shall put the question for adoption of the report forthwith,

and at such time the bills shall be ordered for third reading, which order may be called that same day.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Baker has moved—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Dispense? Okay, I heard “dispense.” Do we agree? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Orders of the day? I recognize the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Flynn has moved adjournment of the House. Agreed? Agreed.

The House adjourned at 1753.

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Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
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Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB) McDonell, Jim (PC) McGarry, Hon. / L'hon. Kathryn (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry Cambridge	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McMahon, Hon. / L'hon. Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
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Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea-Gore-Malton	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint de parti reconnu
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward-Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto-Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga-Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Hon. / L'hon. Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron-Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe-Grey	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough-Agincourt	Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
		Premier / Première ministre
		Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC)	Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke	
Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin-Middlesex-London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation / Ministre des Relations avec les Autochtones et de la Réconciliation
Vacant	Niagara West-Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest-Glanbrook	
Vacant	Ottawa-Vanier	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Monique Taylor
Bob Delaney, Cheri DiNovo
Joe Dickson, Han Dong
Michael Harris, Sophie Kiwala
Arthur Potts, Todd Smith
Monique Taylor
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Ann Hoggarth
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Han Dong, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Ann Hoggarth
Cristina Martins, Peter Z. Milczyn
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Yvan Baker, Mike Colle
Grant Crack, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Harinder Malhi
Jim McDonnell, Lou Rinaldi
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
James J. Bradley, Raymond Sung Joon Cho
Wayne Gates, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Cristina Martins
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Mike Colle
Bob Delaney, Randy Hillier
Michael Mantha, Arthur Potts
Shafiq Qaadri, Laurie Scott
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

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Granville Anderson, Robert Bailey
James J. Bradley, Steve Clark
Vic Dhillon, Sophie Kiwala
Michael Mantha, Monte McNaughton
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
John Fraser, Ernie Hardeman
Percy Hatfield, Monte Kwinter
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Peter Z. Milczyn, Julia Munro
Arthur Potts
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Joe Dickson
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Grant Crack
Joe Dickson, Jennifer K. French
Ted McMeekin, Mario Sergio
Bill Walker, Soo Wong
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Granville Anderson, Lorne Coe
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
Amrit Mangat, Gila Martow
Ted McMeekin, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch