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Lundi
26 février 2018

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Président : L'honorable Dave Levac
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 26 February 2018

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 26 février 2018

The House met at 1030.

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

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): This being the first sitting Monday of the month—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, it's an oddity—I ask everyone to join us in the singing of the Canadian national anthem.

Singing of O Canada.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to welcome and introduce to the House today a guest. The mayor of Carleton Place, Louis Antonakos, is joining us this morning for meetings.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: A very close friend of mine and his wife are here today. The former mayor of Osgoode and the former councillor for Osgoode township is my dear friend Doug Thompson and his wife, Mary Lynne. They're up here today. They won't be my constituents after June 8, but do you know what? He just might be an MPP by then.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Today I'd like to welcome the parents of our page captain, Harrison Rozon. We have Todd and Wendy Rozon here today, and brother, Lloyd, and aunt, Tamara Finch. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: It's my pleasure to welcome some constituents from my great riding of Scarborough—Guildwood. The family of our page, Theebana, is here today: her father, Thavarajah Nagaratham; her mother, Latharooby Thavarajah; as well as her brother, Garesh Thavarajah. Please welcome them this morning to the Legislature.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It is my pleasure to introduce Leona Appiah. She is a student of Ryerson University who is doing an internship in my office. Welcome, Leona.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I see that a friend of mine is in the audience this morning: Don McGugan. He is the mayor of Brooke-Alviston down around Lambton county. I don't hear the member from Lambton making an introduction, so welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm very pleased to welcome the parents of my policy adviser, Kyle Reaburn. Jamie and Linda are here for their first time at Queen's Park. If I may, Jamie Reaburn will be celebrating a birthday on Wednesday, and I would like to wish him an early happy birthday.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'm very honoured to welcome the mayor of Brooke-Alviston and his wife, Don and Anne McGugan, and also councillor Frank Nemcek. I'd like to let everyone know that on March 15, Don and Anne will be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. On March 4, Frank Nemcek and his wife will be celebrating 40 years of marriage, so congratulations.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am delighted to welcome this morning Jaskiran Shoker, who is an OLIP intern who is doing her placement in my office this session.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Please join me in welcoming to this House Maurice Swan and his son, Brendan Swan, from the riding of Mississauga South. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. James J. Bradley: I would like to welcome to the Legislature today Bruce Sinclair and his grandson, Aidan Payne, who are here to view democracy in action.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to recognize that today's page captain is Noor Soliman, who comes from the riding of Toronto Centre. I just want to give a shout-out to Noor for being our page captain today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I do have an introduction. I'm not going to name every single one of them, but we have today in the Speaker's gallery, from the St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre, which used to be the school that I was principal of—when it closed, it became the “centre.” With them are some wonderful staff that were former colleagues of mine, and I'm glad to see them. Again, I'm not going to name them—right, Patti? The students from the learning centre have come to watch democracy at work. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

FLOODING

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Speaking of democracy at work, I personally want to thank all of the members from both sides for the kind words and support that all of you have shown for the community of Brantford and the other areas of the province that get flooded. I can only tell you that your support is deeply appreciated. I made sure the community knew that the entire House was on our side, and I want to thank you for that.

1040

Finally, to each of us, I know that you are of the same ilk when it comes to your community, and I thank you for that. Your passion for the people that you represent is always known, sometimes underscored, sometimes not

appreciated. But I want to talk to you about that for one moment and simply say that the emergency response team was miraculous. I want to thank them all for the work that they have done in keeping our people safe and our property safe. We're in the recovery stage, and things are going quite well. I appreciate everyone for their kind words and their actions.

It is therefore now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is for the Acting Premier. There is no doubt the government's retaliatory, unfair procurement legislation, Bill 194, is nothing more than an election ploy by an out-of-touch, out-of-ideas government.

This is a government that does not understand business, and clearly, Speaker, this government does not even care to understand business. This bill makes it painfully obvious. Threatening Ontario's largest trading partners is not an appropriate response.

Will the government come clean and admit this is just a crass political ploy and not a real solution to help Ontario business?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I find it deeply, deeply troubling that a member of the official opposition, a member of the Conservative Party, would stand in this place and make it abundantly clear that that party—

Mr. Steve Clark: No other province has got a similar piece of legislation—not one.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As nice as I was, I can be bad. The heckling stops or we'll move into warnings.

Carry on.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Speaker. As I was saying, that a member of Ontario's Conservative Party would stand here in their place and make it completely and abundantly clear that they—

Mr. Steve Clark: Name me one other province. Name me one.

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

Anyone else want a warning?

Carry on.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: —and, as I was saying, Speaker, make it abundantly clear that the Conservative Party has no interest in standing up for the businesses and workers and families of this province is a very sad comment—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. We're in warnings.

Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Acting Premier: Rocco Rossi, president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, summed it up pretty well. He said, "Positive diplomatic relations should always be our priority when it comes to trade discussions.... We are concerned with any approach that risks escalation of trade barriers, especially when it is taken only by Ontario. No other province in Canada has legislation in place that would escalate trade sanctions...."

Speaker, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce believes that the best approach for Ontario is to support the formation of positive bilateral co-operation with our American neighbours. Why is this Liberal government risking our province's relationships for their own political gain?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I would say to the Conservative member opposite to not hide behind the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and just admit here in this chamber that they have no interest in standing up for the workers and businesses and families of this province—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Niagara West–Glanbrook is warned.

Finish.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: There is a reason that the economic track record in this province is so stellar, and has been for a number of months—in fact, years. Job creation, GDP growth: We're leading in the country. Unemployment is lower than it has been at any point in the last 17 years. That's because our government makes the right kind of investments, and fundamentally we stand up for the people that we're proud to represent.

It's why the Premier has been engaging with American governors, it's why various ministers have been front and centre on the NAFTA talks, and it's why we will never apologize for standing up for workers, families and businesses. Unlike the Conservatives, we are on the side of all Ontarians.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Back to the Acting Premier: The Liberals never seem to understand how business works in Ontario. This legislation goes to show that some things never change.

As our leader said last week, "Something this important cannot be rushed through"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Minister of Economic Development and Growth is warned.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I wouldn't take the risk.

Finish, please.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "This government's knee-jerk reaction is simply" politics in place of good policy. "They did not put forward a well-crafted, well-thought-out, meaningful response" to American policies that could impact Ontario. The unfair procurement act is simply making a threat.

Speaker, will the Liberals put the province first, once and for all, instead of their political ploys?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: President of the Treasury Board.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: It's rather rich, Speaker, to stand on this side of the House, where we're standing up for Ontario workers and businesses, and hear the rhetoric from the opposite side—this, in the absence of a coherent, cohesive response to what is happening south of the border.

It's important to know that this party opposite derailed the debate on this important legislation last week.

We are showing leadership, Speaker. We are out in front of this. Our Premier has been in front of it. My colleagues the Minister of Trade—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin-Caledon is warned.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: My colleagues the Minister of Trade and the Minister of Economic Development and Growth—if this party opposite had been paying attention, they would have noticed that they have been in the United States talking to our key trading partners.

On behalf of Canadian and Ontario workers and businesses, that's where we stand. I'm not sure where they stand, but this is where we stand.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Today we're joined at Queen's Park by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They've come from one corner of this province to the other. But no matter what corner of the province they come from, they have identified the same issue. The ability to recruit and retain top talent was identified as the number one issue by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

This skills mismatch was created and fostered by the Liberal government over a 15-year period. Mr. Speaker, we should be helping Ontario businesses grow, so why are this government and this minister content with letting the skills mismatch grow in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I do welcome the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, who have been long-time advocates for businesses in our community. I appreciate their pre-budget submissions. We've had a lot of discussions, and it's extremely valuable.

Those priorities do matter. It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that over the past number of budgets that I've had the privilege of presenting, we've included apprenticeship training programs; we've included more funding for skills training and experiential learning; we've allowed, in the last fall economic statement, \$12,000 more to help apprenticeships in new sectors of the economy. We've also tried to enhance our provincial nominee program to incent even more immigration in skilled trades to come to our province. And, Mr. Speaker, every single time, that member and her party voted against those measures.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: This member and this party voted against those measures because you lost 51,000 jobs last month. Of the Ontario businesses who attempted to recruit staff in the last six months of 2016, 82% experienced at least one challenge in doing so because of your policies. Finding someone with proper qualifications is something that this province has not allowed.

Of the new jobs created in the next decade, 40% are expected to be in the skilled trades, yet here in Ontario, only 26% of young people are considering a career in these areas.

This government continues to ignore the problem and continues to ignore the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

So I ask again, Mr. Speaker: The skills mismatch in Ontario is real, so why, then, does the government ignore these problems? Why are they turning their backs on Ontario businesses and young people who are trying to find work?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, let me correct some of the record here. We have over 800,000 net new jobs since the depths of the recession. Year-over-year increases are better this year than they were in previous years, notwithstanding the seasonal fluctuation that happened over Christmas. The majority of jobs are private sector jobs. The majority of them are full-time, high-paying jobs.

At the same time, we must continue to encourage the training and education that we put forward in our programs.

Again, the member opposite—with all due respect—voted against those very measures that enhance their capabilities and their skill sets in order for them to be more competitive long-term.

1050

We've also invested \$190 billion more over the next 13 years for infrastructure spending—that creates 100,000 net new jobs in our province every year already—going on to an additional 300,000. The member opposite knows full well that we lead the G7, we lead Canada and we lead in employment. We're at full capacity and the lowest unemployment in 17 years.

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

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, there is not one person that believes that. In fact, in a recent Ontario Chamber of Commerce report, they said that the majority of Ontario businesses do not have a lot of optimism for the future, as a result of your government's policies. If you want to talk about leading, you lead the world in the largest sub-national debt in the world.

Let's get back to what the Ontario Chamber of Commerce wants. They want you to vote for prosperity, yet your government only wants to vote for yourselves. Liberal priorities have long not been Ontario priorities. Their too-fast, too-rushed policies are hurting Ontario businesses from Ottawa to Windsor. Many are closing up shop. They are laying off people. They are cancelling expansion.

The message from this government is clear: It's Liberals first, Ontarians second. That needs to change, Mr. Speaker. Will the government put job creation ahead of their political crassness and their ploys?

Hon. Charles Sousa: The member opposite talked about us as a subnational jurisdiction in the world. We are one of the largest subnational jurisdictions by way of GDP and economic strength. We've grown from \$600 billion to over \$800 billion right now. We are leading the way, in all of the world, in regard to that.

Furthermore, she makes reference about helping people, helping businesses. We've provided capital cost allowances to accelerate their expense so they become more competitive. We just reduced the taxes, the CIT rate, on small businesses. We are continuing to provide R&D tax credits to support them. We're providing some of these measures to provide for skills and employment—\$2,000 per individual who is a youth to get to work so that they too can get the proper training.

The member opposite knows that. And I dare say that, as a result of her desire to see people “helped,” they're delaying minimum wage; they are delaying the support for those very people that we do want to support, who grow our economy.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: On behalf of New Democrats, we stand in solidarity with the people of Chatham-Kent who have been dealing with floods and evacuations this weekend. I hope that everything will be back to normal soon.

My question is for the Acting Premier. We are just two months into 2018, but this weekend we learned that Queensway Carleton Hospital had to call its second code orange of the year, which is also the second code orange in its entire history. Twice this year, not only was the emergency department overflowing, but all the beds in that hospital were full, all the surge-capacity beds were full, all the unconventional beds were full, and dozens of people needing hospital care needed to be admitted.

How does the Premier plan to ensure that Queensway Carleton front-line health care workers have what they need to care for the people who come through this hospital's doors?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question with regard to our hospitals. I want to acknowledge and give my appreciation for the hard work of the front-line health care workers at Queensway Carleton and across this province.

It is true that they are facing some capacity challenges at Queensway Carleton, as they are in some hospitals across this province. I know, in the case of Queensway, the flu impact has been significant to their situation. In the month of January, to give a reference point, their capacity at Queensway Carleton was 95%, and in December of last year, the capacity of Queensway Carleton Hospital

was 89%. They are facing some challenges, as the member opposite mentioned.

That's why we have dramatically increased the number of acute care beds across this province, by 1,200, the equivalent of six community care hospitals.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Everyone in Ontario, no matter where they live, should be confident that, in the case of an emergency, if you need hospital care, it will be there for you. Hospitals do not turn people away. This is like a basic of medicare. But knowing that your local hospital has been so crowded already this year that they've had to call code orange twice shakes people's confidence in our health care system, especially Ottawa families, who just last fall watched as the same hospital had to cancel 15 surgeries because they were so overcrowded. They even ran out of IV poles.

What is the minister doing right now for this hospital to ensure that Queensway Carleton does not have to call a third code orange this month?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I'm confident that the hard-working staff at Queensway Carleton are putting into place measures to not only combat the high volume of cases they're seeing in their emergency in their hospital because of the flu season—fortunately, when it comes to influenza A, we are past the peak in most if not all parts of the province and we're on the downswing.

As we saw for Queensway Carleton—the 95% capacity in January, the 89% capacity in December—I'm confident that very, very soon things will return to normal. We did provide them with additional surge beds to enable them to deal with this challenge. And of course, we increased funding at Queensway Carleton by \$3 million this fiscal year; half a billion dollars to hospitals across this province; and 1,200 new acute care beds. We have actually recommitted to those beds and more, with nearly \$200 million for additional acute care beds across the province, including in Ottawa, for the next fiscal year.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: The minister makes it sound like hospital overcrowding just happened with the last flu season. It has been something working not overnight but because of this government's shortchange of our hospitals for so many years now. The minister's solutions clearly are not working. If they were, Queensway Carleton would not have to declare two code oranges in the first two months of 2018.

Why doesn't the minister understand what needs to be done to ensure that families across this province have access to the health care and the hospital care that they need?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We are working with our hospitals across this province, with our LHINS, with our health care leadership and providers. But what we won't do is what they did when they were in government. They closed—

Interjection.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I know they're saying, "Here it comes," but it's a fact. It's clear knowledge to everybody. They closed 9,645 hospital beds. Imagine the impact of that, Mr. Speaker, if we were to consider anything even marginally a fraction of that. They closed 13% of the mental health beds in this province and 24% of the acute hospital beds in the province. They delisted home care. They cut health care funding across the board in their last budget. In their last budget, they reduced hospital funding by 1%.

I know they'd love to divorce themselves from that one time in distant memory when they were leading this province as government. If they ever got close to leading this province again, we would see absolute across-the-board devastation in our health care sector from them.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Acting Premier. Chris Punter is a grandfather from London who needs heart surgery. He was scheduled to go to University Hospital for what his surgeon expects will be a quadruple bypass on February 9. Today he is still waiting for this life-saving surgery. It has been postponed four times because the hospital is just too overcrowded to do it.

Does the Acting Premier think that it is okay to keep Chris Punter waiting for his life-saving heart surgery?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: To the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. I think we all agree that any time there is a cancelled surgery, it can be not only anxiety-provoking but heartbreaking for a family, so we work across the health care system to make sure that we provide that highest quality of care where and when individuals need it.

My sincere apologies for any family or any individual that has to go through that anxiety of having an elective surgery—this is what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker, elective surgery—be postponed. But it's critically important that our system is built to serve those who need that most critical care and to serve them first. That's why our hospitals, in fact, are built to triage those high-acuity patients to ensure that they receive timely and safe emergency access.

Most of us, I think, probably wouldn't imagine that London Health Sciences last year in emergency saw 160,000 patients and they have over 50,000 scheduled operations a year through that hospital. I'm happy to talk more about the details in the supplementary.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: A University Hospital VP put the blame squarely on the overcrowding crisis when she was asked why Mr. Punter's surgery has been delayed. She said, "Since the beginning of the year, London Health Sciences Centre has consistently operated at over 100% occupancy. Limited system-wide capacity in our region has created challenges, particularly with respect to critic-

al care capacity required to meet the post-operative care needs of some cardiac surgery patients."

Speaker, how can this Liberal government continue to deny that hospital overcrowding is a crisis?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: In fact, Mr. Speaker, at London Health Sciences Centre, the capacity in December was 92%; in November, it was 94%. In fact, in December, 99% of the cardiac surgeries that were scheduled took place within the province's targeted amount of time—99%.

There are over 50,000 scheduled operations a year—and this is not in any way to diminish the anxiety, the inconvenience and the stress caused by this rescheduling of the elective surgery. In a two-year period—the last two years—out of 150,000 surgeries performed on time, 66 surgeries in that two-year period had to be re-scheduled. That's 66 out of 150,000 surgeries that were performed over two years on time—

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Speaker, I can't believe the minister is questioning the data from a University Hospital VP.

Chris's cancelled surgery isn't the only evidence of a hospital system that is bursting at the seams. Just last week, this Legislature learned about Danny Marchand. It took 11 days for Danny to secure a bed in his hometown of London so he could get the surgery he needed after a skiing accident in Collingwood. We've heard from families in London, in Hamilton, in Toronto, in Sudbury.

You can't fix the problem unless you name the problem: Will the Acting Premier admit that his cuts to health care have hurt these families?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: We continue to invest across the health care system, whether that's cardiac care—and I have to say, we have one of the best cardiac programs, bar none, in this province that has been built up because of the hard work, dedication and commitment of cardiologists, nurse specialists, nurse practitioners and that entire team of health care professionals who work so hard to do that.

Mr. Speaker, across the health care system, I'm the first to acknowledge that we need to continue to make those important investments and we need to make improvements. But for the member opposite to suggest what she is, and not to champion the fact that we have one of the best health care systems in the world, with the best outcomes in this country and in the OECD for almost all of the activities that we carry out—and that's a result of working closely in collaboration with all the hundreds of thousands of health care providers who do that excellent job every single day.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Acting Premier. This weekend, we learned that not only did the now-shuffled former transportation minister interfere with a Metrolinx decision for a \$100-million GO station approval; he did it four times. That's right, Speaker. The

Toronto Star has reported evidence of the former minister's outside push to alter planning evidence at Metrolinx on four separate projects. Of course, we all know, as MPPs, that we advocate for projects in our ridings, but only the minister was able to alter evidence.

Speaker, will the Acting Premier tell me if this Liberal ministerial interference was what shuffled the meddling minister out of transportation?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Metrolinx's board of directors approved the addition of 12 new GO stations in June 2016. As they have stated, "This decision came as a result of initial business case analysis, extensive consultation with municipal and regional representatives, community engagement and collaboration between the Ministry of Transportation and Metrolinx on wider" regional "transit and transportation plans.... All proposed new stations require additional technical and planning analysis," which has been made very clear.

My understanding is that Metrolinx has done substantial work on their business case analysis methodology. They have committed to posting business cases prior to the board decisions on projects being made. Metrolinx will also be providing an update on all stations at their March 8 board meeting.

Our government is going to continue to build the transit that the people of the GTHA need and deserve. I look forward to seeing the results of Metrolinx's work in the upcoming board meeting.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the Acting Premier—and I would encourage the now-Minister of Transportation to pick up a copy of the Star and read that article from Ben Spurr.

Look, what other ministers are changing documents ahead of the election to bolster their chances? We've seen it four separate times from the former Minister of Transportation alone now, and instead of being moved from cabinet, he got shuffled over to economic development.

Speaker, this was interference, plain and simple. Will the Acting Premier tell us what documents have been altered from other ministries to get the Liberals elected in the next election?

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: When I stepped into this role, I knew that I was taking on a thriving portfolio. Under my predecessor's watch, this region has seen the advancement of transformational transit projects, like GO regional express rail and rapid transit projects across the GTHA. I'm proud to continue the work that was started before my time.

But while we're moving forward, the PCs have a plan to take us backwards with billions and billions of dollars in cuts. That means that under the PC plan, a GO expansion of this size would be off the table, and that also means no new Breslau station in the member from Kitchener-Conestoga's own riding.

We're going to get this right. I look forward to seeing the results of Metrolinx's work. We're going to continue

to build Ontario up with the transit that all communities across Ontario need and deserve in this province.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Acting Premier. This is a question I would have thought the official opposition might have asked today, but given what's going on with the allegations about ballot stuffing and different issues they have in their particular nomination battles, I can understand why not.

My question is: Today, one of your senior officials is in court, waiting for sentencing when it comes to the gas plants scandal that happened here in this province. Not only did the Liberal government waste \$1 billion of taxpayers' money that could have been used for things like health care and others, but at the end of the day, you tried to cover it up. I think that is the thing that is really galling in all of this, because what it really means is that you can't trust the Liberals.

My question is: Does this government defend the actions of the senior Liberal operatives who have been found guilty in court?

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

I gave the member some opportunity to explain why he was asking in the manner that he was. He did indicate something to me that is not parliamentary and I will ask him to withdraw.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Acting Premier?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I know the member opposite wants to use the verdict in this case to score political points. It was very clear from his question, where he was trying to do a two-way street attack here. I think, Speaker, we need to be mindful that this matter is still under an appeal period and we have to respect that. I think we also have to be reminded that the individual we're speaking about worked for the former Premier, not under this Premier.

Under this government, under this Premier, we have taken our obligations very seriously when it comes to making our document retention policies strong, and being open, accountable and transparent. In her report, the then-Information and Privacy Commissioner credited our government for improving record-keeping across government. In the supplementary, I would like to discuss the steps we have taken to enhance that process.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The minister says, "Oh, he worked for the former Premier." I want you guys to look in the mirror: You all worked for the former Premier. You were in his cabinet and you're the guys who cancelled the gas plant, the situation that happened.

I'm going to ask you again. This gentleman has been brought to court. He has been found guilty. He is now waiting for sentencing. The question we ask you is a very simple one: Do you condone the actions of this gentleman? If not, what are you going to do about it?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, we take very seriously our responsibility to ensure that our document retention policy in the Ontario government is one of the strongest and most stringent since our Premier came into office.

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Speaker, as I said, even the former Information and Privacy Commissioner has praised the government for the steps we have taken. We have sent a directive to all political staff. We have developed mandatory training programs when it comes to document retention policies. We have appointed chiefs of staff who are accountable for record-keeping. We have improved the archiving requirements.

In fact, Speaker, we also have an accountability act which would prohibit the willful deletion of records and will create a penalty.

Our offices have worked with the Integrity Commissioner and the Information and Privacy Commissioner. We have taken concrete steps to ensure that the documents are retained and kept, to make sure that our system is open, accountable and transparent.

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

Mr. Yvan Baker: My question is to the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science. For decades, manufacturing has been the backbone of our economy here in Ontario. In fact, nearly half of Canada's total manufacturing output is located here in Ontario. However, with the emergence of new technologies, many economies around the world are adopting advanced manufacturing in order to become more globally competitive. Minister, I understand that our government is making investments in several tech projects to help Ontario companies in that regard.

I understand the federal government recently announced the successful applicants of the new superclusters initiative that is aimed at strengthening Canada's most dynamic regional innovation ecosystems. Minister, could you share with us how this program will benefit Ontario's economy and high-growth businesses?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member from Etobicoke Centre for that question. Mr. Speaker, since the year 2013, our government has invested more than \$2 billion in support to Ontario's manufacturers, helping create and retain over 90,000 jobs.

I was thrilled to learn that an Ontario-based Advanced Manufacturing Supercluster proposal was selected and will be receiving up to \$230 million from the federal funding. The proposal has been led by Next Generation Manufacturing Canada. This bid will link the technology and manufacturing sector by using big data and intelligent machines. The supercluster will introduce new investments and create high-quality jobs for our people in the province of Ontario. I want to thank our federal government for choosing Ontario for this proposal.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Yvan Baker: This is promising news, Minister; thank you for that.

On Sunday morning I was watching Fareed Zakaria GPS on CNN. He actually had a really interesting piece that was talking about the importance of AI and how economies around the world are competing to be leaders in AI to drive their economies; that this is the next frontier.

My understanding is that we, here in Ontario, are now home to a thriving artificial intelligence sector with more than 200 AI firms and institutions, which I think is great news. Nearly \$3 billion has been raised by Ontario-based AI companies.

Minister, I understand that an artificial intelligence proposal out of Quebec with deep linkages to Ontario was also selected for funding under the superclusters initiative that you were just speaking about. Could you share with us more about this supercluster proposal and how it will benefit our economy and our growing AI ecosystem?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member again for that question.

Mr. Speaker, over the last year, we have committed nearly half a billion dollars to transformative technology investments. That includes \$50 million to the Vector Institute for Artificial Intelligence.

I was pleased to hear the AI-Powered Supply Chains Supercluster out of Quebec was also selected for funding under the superclusters initiative by the federal government. There are 30 Ontario firms and several post-secondary institutions in Ontario that are involved in this supercluster. This project will complement Ontario's existing artificial intelligence capacity and solidify Canada's position as a global leader in artificial intelligence.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to invest in the innovation economy as we move forward.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is for the Acting Premier this morning. Today, the sentencing for the Premier's most senior official is taking place in a courtroom just down the street from here. While the justice system has taken its course and there has been a guilty verdict, no verdict is going to return the \$1.1 billion that the Liberal government wasted just to win seats in an election. Sadly, the gas plant scandal is just one example of the consistent pattern of political gamesmanship and malfeasance by this Liberal government. Mr. Speaker, those \$1.1 billion that saved a few Liberal seats are worth much more to the people of Ontario.

Now that the court case is concluding, Speaker, will this Liberal government apologize to the people of Ontario for years of political corruption?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I find that the member did use some unparliamentary language. He'll withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: I withdraw.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, and the member opposite should be looking in the mirror before talking about corruption in this House, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister will withdraw.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I withdraw.

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

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: On this side of the House, under the leadership of our Premier, Kathleen Wynne, our government is focused on ensuring that we're building fairness and opportunity for the hard-working people of Ontario. On this side of the House, we are absolutely committed to ensuring that there is a \$15-an-hour living wage starting January 1, 2019, unlike the party opposite, who have decided that the hard-working people of this province should not get a living wage. Every single leadership contestant has clearly said that they will not have a \$15 minimum wage. That is unacceptable.

Similarly, in this part of the House, we are absolutely committed to fighting climate change by putting a price on carbon through our cap-and-trade system, whereas the other side, the Ontario Conservatives, are still stuck in the 19th century and think there is no climate change problem. That is not acceptable.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: What a pile of rubbish; honest to goodness. These guys will make up anything. A senior official in the Liberal government has been found guilty of deleting documents to try and hide the truth from the people of Ontario—guilty as charged, Mr. Speaker. Following the campaign that was co-chaired by Premier Wynne, the Liberals were only concerned about their political interests—that's it—not the \$1.1 billion that they wasted to save a couple of Liberal—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Todd Smith: In short, this Liberal government can't be trusted any longer. Speaker, with only months to go until the provincial election, how can Ontario be sure that this Liberal government won't waste billions more to try and save their seats?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: The member should be looking at his own party for a pile of rubbish and rot—their words, not mine—when he's talking about that. The people of Ontario deserve a government that is working on their behalf. The people of Ontario deserve a government that is ensuring that hard-working Ontarians get a \$15-an-hour living wage. The government of Premier Kathleen Wynne is delivering on it. The people of Ontario deserve a government that takes climate change seriously and effectively deals with that. That is what the government of Premier Kathleen Wynne is accomplishing.

Speaker, those are the kinds of things we are fighting for. We are ensuring that children and youth in this province can get access to universal pharmacare, and that is why our government has brought in OHIP+, which the

party opposite voted against. So before they start giving the rest of us a lecture, look at the record of this government and how we are standing on the side of the people of this province.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Minister of Health. Last week, the chief nursing executive at St. Mary's hospital said that the Kitchener hospital is operating at 110% capacity. We all know by now that safe operating capacity is 85%. Fourteen patients were left waiting in the emergency department, and the hospital had no choice but to cancel surgeries as a last resort for dealing with this overcrowding crisis. Doctors were also asked to assess their patients and to discharge them as soon as possible.

Why does this minister think it's acceptable for patients in Kitchener to be held in the emergency department with no end in sight and for people's surgeries to be cancelled because the overcrowding crisis has gotten so bad in this province?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I appreciate the question. I had the opportunity earlier to talk about the measures that we're taking to work with our hospitals, the Ontario Hospital Association, and our front-line health care workers to address some of the capacity challenges that they are facing. We have taken such measures as investing an additional \$1 billion in our hospitals over the last two years: last year, 3.1% into the hospital system in the spring budget, and 1,200 new acute care beds across this province announced in the fall—the equivalent of six community hospitals.

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We continue to invest hundreds of millions of dollars to reduce wait times. We have programs specific to our emergencies across the province as well, giving them additional staff and finances to enable them to address the capacity challenges that they might find. We are making investments in our health care system, including in our hospitals.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Minister of Health: Listen, hospital administration and staff are doing the best that they can with the very limited resources that they have. Fifteen years of Liberal government budget cuts and freezes, combined with the last Conservative government, have caused this mess in our hospitals. People in KW are feeling the impact of hospital cuts when they are forced to wait in the emergency room for days—or on a stretcher in a hallway.

St. Mary's says this problem is bigger than the typical flu season surge. We believe them. This hospital has been experiencing an ongoing volume increase for more than a year.

Health care staff and resources are strained. It's directly impacting the health of families in my community. These problems don't just show up overnight; they are years in the making. Why does this government think

that the people in Kitchener should just settle for a dangerously overcrowded hospital and cancelled surgeries, when our community deserves so much better?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that her community remember what she said during the 2014 election. While the leader of the third party—her leader—refused to identify her \$600 million in planned NDP cuts, the Kitchener–Waterloo NDP candidate at the time, now the member, was forced to admit that the health care and post-secondary education sectors had been singled out for their deepest cuts. In fact, the CBC reported on May 29 of 2014: “The NDP platform is silent on exactly where that \$600 million in savings might come from. One broad hint emerged on the campaign trail ... when Kitchener–Waterloo NDP candidate Catherine Fife said the NDP's new accountability minister would look to find efficiencies in the health care and post-secondary education sectors.”

In fact, the member from Kitchener–Waterloo at the time went on to say, “I would go first to health.”

POLICE SERVICES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Minister, this past November our government introduced the Safer Ontario Act, which represents the greatest transformation to policing in 25 years. This legislation, if passed, would modernize policing and create stronger, safer communities where people get the services they need, when and where they need them the most. But even so, Minister, I'm getting letters and hearing from a few of my constituents, and police officers, that they think the Safer Ontario Act would make Ontario less safe. Some say that this bill would allow for the privatization of policing.

Our government has worked on this bill for over five years, and I find it hard to believe that this is truly the case. Could the minister clarify exactly what the proposed legislation would do in this regard?

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: I want to say thank you to the member from Northumberland–Quinte West for the very important question. First let me say that law enforcement across this province do a tremendous job keeping our communities safe. That's why we actually live in the safest jurisdiction in North America.

To your question, I want to be very, very clear that we are not privatizing core policing duties. When you call 911, a highly trained police officer will always answer the call.

The reality is that the current Police Services Act is too permissive when it comes to privatization, effectively allowing government to hand over any policing function to private companies. This bill will guarantee that any future government could not jeopardize the safety of our communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I want to thank the minister for her answer and for giving clarity to this matter. I know that

the minister worked hard on this bill with all of our policing partners and will continue to do so as it moves through this legislative process.

The proposed legislation is, in part, based on lessons learned from past governments. We once saw a former government try to privatize public safety services. A failed private jail experiment comes to mind, Speaker. This bill will in fact protect our policing system from such disastrously misguided efforts.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, could the minister inform this House why this policing transformation is so essential?

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you to the member for the supplementary.

Mr. Speaker, times have changed. The pressures on our law enforcement are unlike anything we have ever seen before. We are relying on a model that is based on reactive policing, one that puts extraordinary pressure on police. There are days that an officer may be forced to be a social worker, a nurse, a doctor—all at the same time. It's unfair to our incredible police officers to be everything to everyone.

The Safer Ontario Act represents a shift to a collaborative, proactive model of policing that would much better serve our communities. This collaborative approach is not limited to our efforts to modernize policing. Our government is using the same rationale to transform the court system, mental health care and our correctional system. These changes are all part of our vision for a truly 21st-century justice system.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is for the Acting Premier.

I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is visiting Chatham-Kent today. He's surveying the state of emergency after recent flooding, which I appreciate. Swollen by days of heavy rain and melting snow, the Thames River peaked Saturday night in Chatham at 5.25 metres above normal. That's over 17.2 feet. Houses and businesses have been ruined. Citizens have been working around the clock, monitoring their property and operating pumps.

The municipality of Chatham-Kent opened its convention centres to residents who had been forced to leave their homes, but the full extent of damage is still unclear. When the disaster is over, we're going to need government support. When my constituents turn to your government for help, what are you going to tell them?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: First of all, on behalf of the government and all members of this House, I want to obviously show our sympathy with the people of Chatham-Kent and the people of Brantford who are going through this extraordinary circumstance, as the spring is arriving and ice is thawing and with the rising levels in the rivers that we've seen. Just watching the images on television—and I'm sure the member opposite is personally involved in assisting his constituents, as you

are, Speaker, in your own community. You can see the distress and devastation.

The Premier, just last week, last Thursday, visited Brantford herself personally and assured the people around the entire region that the Ontario government will be there with all kinds of supports, through various programs that we have in place to make sure that the communities—both residents and municipalities—have the opportunity to work through the challenges that they're going through.

Right now, of course, the immediate focus is to contain this flood, and I'm sure that the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services will speak more to that effort.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I spent the weekend touring my riding to observe first-hand the damage and distress my constituents were experiencing. This past Friday and Saturday, fire crews, dive teams and EMS rescued many residents, including children, from their flooded properties in Chatham-Kent. I want to congratulate the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority for continually monitoring the severity of the flooding. I am so proud of how everyone pulled and worked together. The worst may be over, but until water levels go back to normal, our first responders are still going to have a tough time. People will still be out of house and home.

To the Acting Premier: What specifically will the government do to support my constituents, the families and businesses affected by this?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you again to the member for this question.

Certainly, our government has been engaged and involved. I know my colleague has said the same: For all the people affected, our thoughts are with them, and we want to thank the first responders, our municipal leaders and everyone who has been—and I know, Mr. Speaker, that you were in your community and also in our Six Nations.

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The Minister of Municipal Affairs is actually moving forward today in going to Brantford and to your community of Chatham-Kent to talk to our municipal leaders and our first responders and looking at the possibilities of our program. Let me talk to you about what we're going to be doing. Basically, we're going to be assessing the damage caused, sadly, by the flooding, and this may lead to an activation of our provincial disaster recovery assistance program. That program is the only one in Canada that offers that support.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Acting Premier. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce recently released their 2018 Ontario Economic Report. In it, they found that the government's rosy statements about the

economy don't hold true for all regions of this province. The north can expect stagnant unemployment rates into 2018, and southwestern Ontario will lag behind the rest of the province when it comes to creating jobs.

Ontario's non-partisan Financial Accountability Officer agrees with their assessment. Last year in the north, the southwest and eastern parts of this province combined, only 1,600 new jobs were created. Speaker, why is this Liberal government leaving whole regions of this province behind?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: To the Minister of Economic Development and Growth.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I've had the opportunity over the last number of days here in the Legislature to talk a little bit about the economic success we've been having as a province over the last number of years. I know members from both opposition caucuses have heard us talk about the fact that, since the recessionary low about a decade ago, Ontario has created over 800,000 jobs—nearly 850,000 new jobs—with more than 90% of those being full-time and around 70% in above-average-wage industries. About 73% of those were in the private sector.

We also know that year over year, between October 2016 and October 2017, Ontario created about 128,000 jobs. We also know that we now have the lowest unemployment here in the province than we've had over the last 17 years. For 33 consecutive months, our unemployment rate has been lower than the national average.

I will have more to say about the regional issue that was posed in the first question in the follow-up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: At the same time that this government allowed whole regions of this province to be bypassed by economic growth, cities that are creating jobs have become increasingly unaffordable places to live and to do business. The chamber's report focused on the rising cost of living and the growing lack of affordable housing. The report says, "These factors ... not only negatively influence consumers activity but also hinder the ability of industry to attract and retain talent, as local housing options may be unaffordable or inappropriate."

Speaker, why is this Liberal government standing by and watching while the cost of housing becomes out of reach for many Ontario families?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I know that in his first question, the member from Essex alluded to what's taking place, for example, in areas like northern Ontario. Here are a couple of things that I want to reference, because both questions were regional in nature. I'm going to use North Bay as a classic example. In North Bay alone, since about a decade ago, the unemployment rate has dropped from a recessionary high of more than 9% down to today's 5.8%. And that's just the unemployment rate. This government is also helping to create jobs in northern Ontario. In 2017, North Bay's labour force had the employment rate going up. We also know that with programs or vehicles like the NOHFC, we've invested \$60

million in the Nipissing region in more than 400 projects, helping to create or retain over 1,200 jobs.

There are regional economic development funds that exist for southwestern Ontario and for eastern Ontario. My colleague the MPP from Peterborough is doing fantastic work with respect to those regional economic development programs. Collectively, it is all of the initiatives this government is undertaking that are making sure that our economy remains robust.

TENANT PROTECTION

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question today is to the Minister of Housing and the minister responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. We know it's invaluable to have a safe, affordable and adequate place that we can call home. Stable housing is the foundation upon which families in Ontario can build their lives and achieve their full potential.

I'd first like to say that I'm extremely happy to see the work the minister is doing on inclusionary zoning. I've had the opportunity many times in the past few years to have a say on the benefits of the important regulation that this would be to bring more affordable and accessible housing to Ontario. I'm looking forward to seeing the finalized regulations when they are released.

Tenants in my riding of Beaches–East York have been burdened by leases containing outdated, void and oftentimes illegal terms and highly technical language.

I understand the minister made a recent announcement on an updated lease form. Could the minister please expand on that new standard lease?

Hon. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you to the member for Beaches–East York for the question and his advocacy on behalf of affordable housing and in particular on behalf of tenants in his riding.

Mr. Speaker, every Ontarian deserves a safe and affordable place to call home. I'm very proud that we just announced that starting April 30, most landlords will need to use a standard lease for new residential leases.

We worked with landlords and tenants across the province to develop the standard lease. Landlords are happy that they're going to have a standard, easy-to-use form, and tenants are happy that they're going to have a plain-language form, available in English and in French, that's going to clearly lay out what their obligations and their rights are. We made this lease even more accessible by providing a guidebook translating the lease into 21 different languages.

Along with policies like rent control, OHIP+ and increasing the minimum wage, we're making it more affordable and more fair for Ontarians to access housing in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I want to thank the minister for his answer, and I want to particularly thank him for his expertise in this field, as an architect and a man who understands the planning imperatives that need to go into place

for affordable housing in this province. He's doing an excellent job.

Improving access to housing builds all Ontarians up. When we have access to safe and stable housing markets, we are healthier and we are better able to participate in our communities.

There are thousands of residents in my riding who I know are benefiting from the implementation of very progressive provincial programs like those the minister mentioned—rent control, of course, being just one of them.

In my community, Options for Homes is currently in the process of building some 320 units that will help low-to-middle-income families afford to own their own condominium. I'm extremely grateful to be there for the groundbreaking, and I hope they will be finished soon.

I would like to learn more, and I know this House would like to learn more, from the minister responsible for housing and the poverty reduction strategy about what the ministry is doing to bring more fairness to Ontario's rental market in Ontario.

Hon. Peter Z. Milczyn: Through our Fair Housing Plan, we've expanded rent control to virtually all Ontario residential tenants. That granted additional protection to another 237,000 private market renters in our province.

With rent control, our government is fighting for the rights of Ontarians to stay in safe and affordable housing, but of course, there's more to our plan than that. Part of the long-term solution for affordable housing is to build more affordable housing. Our new \$125-million program to rebate development charges for new rental projects in the province is one example of what we're doing. We've leveraged surplus provincial lands in a number of communities to create thousands of new affordable units. And of course inclusionary zoning is on its way through some revised regulations.

I look across the House and I see a party that doesn't even mention affordable housing in its platform.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

As I explained in a letter to the minister at the beginning of this year, the Parry Sound area is suffering from a doctor shortage. The situation was further aggravated by the tragic loss of one of our prominent physicians this past December.

Parry Sound does not have a permanent walk-in clinic, though a temporary occasional clinic has been established by local doctors who are volunteering to address the needs of the community. I want to thank the medical professionals for stepping up to help.

Even so, with 1,200 patients suddenly without a primary care physician, we are seeing many go without adequate care. My office has heard from many complex care patients who are concerned for their health without access to consistent monitoring.

My question is: Does the minister have any plans in place to help recruit physicians for high-need locations like Parry Sound?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I always appreciate the questions from the member opposite, especially on an issue as important as this.

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We know, despite the fact that an estimated 94% of Ontarians have access to a primary care provider—that may be a physician or it may be a nurse practitioner; we have 25 nurse-practitioner-led clinics across the province—there’s more work to be done. We’ve made that commitment so that everyone in this province who does desire or require a primary care provider can find and become attached to that primary care provider.

We have a number of programs in place. In fact, just recently we announced a commitment to ensure that every sub-LHIN region, of which there are approximately 80 around the province, will have an interdisciplinary primary care team. We’re putting the funding into that initiative to ensure that across the province, including in the member opposite’s riding, we have access to those important providers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Back to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care: One of the options available to alleviate a shortage of doctors is to have a locum, or a doctor from another community, temporarily practise in the area. But the criteria to qualify for a locum are based on the number of doctors in a practice rather than on the need of the community. So even in a community like Parry Sound, with a high need, the rules don’t allow for a locum.

My question for the minister: Will the minister review the situation in Parry Sound and approve a locum until more permanent doctors can be found for the area?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, I appreciate the question. In fact, I worked at Parry Sound hospital shortly after graduating from medical school. It’s hard to imagine; it was 1985. That’s 33 years ago this year. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that those providers, be they physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, occupational therapists, the whole gamut of health care professionals—

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Doogie Howser. You must have been 16 years old.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Somebody in the NDP I think is just doing the math now in terms of how long ago that was. I can hear them out of the corner of my ear.

I’m happy to work with the member opposite because this is not only important to him; it’s important to me. We’ll see what we can do.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Acting Premier. Last week, a secret government-commissioned report came to light that describes how public service lawyers for this government may have been pressured or even had their recommendations overturned when it

comes to whether or not to pursue a case in court. The reason given for the pressure was political sensitivities.

Can the Premier please explain if ever the Liberal Party’s political sensitivities influenced whether charges were laid in a case or whether the province chose to pursue a civil case in court, and has the government done anything to investigate this issue?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: We take these types of matters extremely seriously. As I’ve said before, harassment of any kind in any work environment is not acceptable. Our lawyers are agents of the crown who give the best legal advice to the government and dispense of their duties in accordance with their obligations to the law society.

As members know, the ministry held an independent investigation into this matter. The report in question is actually a result of interviews that were done with over 200 lawyers, with many recommendations.

I know, Speaker, that the Deputy Attorney General is very much committed to implementing those reports and making sure that we have a harmonious and a respectful work environment at the Ministry of Attorney General.

BIRTH OF MEMBER’S GRANDCHILD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Transportation on a point of order.

Hon. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you very much, Speaker. Early this morning, my son and daughter-in-law welcomed a new baby girl into this world, so I’m delighted. Our love and congratulations go out to Rory and Anna McGarry and their new baby daughter, Eyva Dagny McGarry.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The chief government whip on a point of order.

Mr. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, they have arrived now. I would like to welcome to the Legislature Mr. Bruce Sinclair and his grandson, who is turning 16 this month: Aidan Payne. They are in the members’ gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. Minister of Advanced Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Point of order, Speaker: Earlier this morning I welcomed our page Theebana’s family, but I neglected to say that today she is the page captain. I want to congratulate her on a job well done today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We’re in a mood; somebody snuck into the House today. That’s no reflection on the Sergeant-at-Arms.

Our guests are from Manitoba. These are the interns from the intern program of Manitoba. Please rise and be accepted into the House.

The time for question period is over. Therefore, the House is recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1145 to 1300.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know I’m not supposed to or I don’t have to do this, but I just want to

acknowledge a new presence in the House, our new table addition, Mr. William Wong.

How are you doing, William? Good? We're glad you're with us at the table today—part of the process of mentoring and making sure everyone has a chance to know how to run this place when Todd and I are no longer wanted.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I rise today to highlight the challenges facing Ontario's small and medium-sized hospitals, including those in my riding, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, which runs the hospitals in Huntsville and Bracebridge, has long faced funding challenges. The residents of these communities are passionate defenders of their hospitals, and I support them in their call to maintain the two full-service hospitals.

MAHC hospitals serve a huge area that runs from Burk's Falls and Magnetawan south to Severn Bridge and east to Algonquin Park. This area has a permanent population of 58,000, but in the summer that number more than doubles to 140,000. In 2016-17, MAHC dealt with 44,236 emergency visits, admitted 4,891 patients, performed 8,547 surgeries and scopes, and delivered 282 babies. My thanks to the 625 staff, 85 physicians and 320 volunteers who make sure residents of east Parry Sound–Muskoka get these services.

But they need more funding to continue to provide top-notch medical services, and they need to know that that funding is stable. Bracebridge mayor Graydon Smith appeared at the pre-budget consultation in Sudbury to advocate for more and stable funding for small and medium-sized hospitals.

The people of Parry Sound–Muskoka and other rural parts of Ontario deserve equal access to health care services.

HOWARD McCURDY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Today, I rise to pay tribute to a very special person, Howard McCurdy. Howard was a member of Parliament for Windsor–Walkerville from 1984 to 1993—the first black NDP member of Parliament and the second-ever black MP in Canada.

An accomplished academic and civil rights advocate, Howard became the first black tenured professor at a Canadian university during his time at Assumption College. He also founded the Guardian Club, a civil rights organization to fight racial discrimination in Windsor, and was a founder and first president of the National Black Coalition of Canada. Howard is also credited with creating the name “New Democratic Party” at our founding convention in 1961.

From as early as age 13, Howard worked hard to fulfill his vision of a just and equitable community. For

his incredible contributions, Howard was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal, the Order of Ontario and the Order of Canada.

Windsor is a richly diverse city, and, in part, we have Howard to thank for that. His legacy lives on in the black Canadian organizations and societies that have built upon the foundation that Howard created. And as we come to the end of Black History Month in Canada, I want all of us to consider how Howard's contributions have shaped this province and this country, and how we can continue to work towards Howard's vision of a better Ontario and Canada.

My sincere condolences to Howard's family and friends. His life has meant so much to the people of Ontario, and we will never forget his legacy.

RIDING OF ETOBICOKE NORTH

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I'm pleased to rise and speak about a number of developments from my own riding of Etobicoke North, whether we go from transport or health care to the free tuition and the minimum wage and the impact it's having in my own riding.

To begin with, we have a \$2-billion Finch light rail transit development which has eight stops, custom-designed, within my own riding. Eight: Count them. They go from Humber College/Highway 27 to Westmore, Martin Grove, Albion, Stevenson, Kipling and Islington.

On top of that, we're looking at a \$400-million expansion of Etobicoke General Hospital, part of the William Osler Health System, where we are quadrupling the floor space, the footprint of the hospital, when the final build-out is happening.

Folks in my riding are particularly benefiting from the government's tuition grant. As you will know, folks making less than \$50,000 annually are now offered two- and four-year college/university tuition for free. There has, of course, been great, fantastic uptake with the north campus of Humber College, to which we also gave, by the way, a \$90-million student centre expansion.

Folks are very much appreciative, as well, of the OHIP+ pharmacare initiative, where for kids and youth under the age of 25 medications are now absolutely free, started on January 1, 2018. As a physician, in particular, I support these initiatives.

It's more good news for Etobicoke North, Speaker.

CORBYN SMITH

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Corbyn Smith is a student at Listowel District Secondary School, and an exceptional sledge hockey athlete.

Sledge hockey, or para ice hockey, is a popular sport in the winter Paralympic Games. Players are strapped to a two-bladed sledge and move along the ice using sticks with spikes on one end and a curved blade for shooting on the other. It's an amazing sport.

Corbyn, along with his teammates, will be heading to Pyeong Chang this week to compete on Canada's official sledge hockey team.

Corbyn had an outstanding 2017. He participated in international tournaments, including the International Para Ice Hockey Tournament in Torino, Italy, and the World Para Ice Hockey Championships in South Korea. Team Canada won gold at both events. Most recently, he got drafted by the national men's sledge hockey Paralympic team. He will be leaving for South Korea this Wednesday to represent Canada at the 2018 winter Paralympic Games.

We are so excited for Corbyn and the whole team. We wish them a safe journey to South Korea, and we will be cheering them on at Queen's Park. Go, Canada, go!

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: The most populated part of my riding is an area called Valley East. It is a growing area with a good mix of senior citizens, young families and everything in between. Like everyone else, I was quite surprised that Valley East's ServiceOntario location was abruptly closed on January 18 of this year.

When I inquired of the ministry, the response stated, "ServiceOntario locations are privately owned and operated. The existing contract has ended. The government has started the process to select a new service provider. The centre will reopen sometime in 2018."

Well, the people of Valley East are not taking this sitting down, Speaker. They want ServiceOntario to reopen, and they want it to be public, not private. They are writing to my office, they are signing petitions and they are demanding that this government open a public ServiceOntario centre to replace the privately managed one that closed. The people of Valley East know that public services should be provided by the government, not a private company that focuses on the bottom line. So I ask the government, will you answer the call of the good people of Valley East and open a public ServiceOntario centre in Valley East?

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, one of our faith community landmarks in western Mississauga celebrated Black History Month with its usual flair. Our many friends at Praise Cathedral Worship Centre in Meadowvale invited me, ward 9 Councillor Pat Saito and Mayor Bonne Crombie to join them in celebrating black culture, values, traditions and the contributions of our black community in northwest Mississauga.

Bishop Lennox DaCosta Walker and his wife, Lady Dorett, are our generous and gracious hosts in a faith community that has built one of Meadowvale's landmark churches, and that counts the breadth and diversity of its membership with a flag procession before each service. The loudest cheer is generally for the entrance of the Jamaica flag-bearer.

Black History Month is also an opportunity to reflect on our universal humanity and on how much more brings us together, as families, in faith communities and as neighbours, than sets us apart. In Black History Month, we join with our black friends and neighbours to define in a dialogue where we are and where we are headed by looking at where we have been and what we can do to improve the way we move forward into a confident and an egalitarian future.

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211 ONTARIO

Mrs. Gila Martow: Last week, we had United Way's project, 211 Ontario, come to visit us here at Queen's Park. Part of the discussion was: How can we raise more awareness? Not enough people know that they can dial 211 on a telephone or log onto www.211ontario.ca and get confidential, non-emergency telephone and online services. It's information on government and community-based non-clinical health care and social services. It really helps people navigate all the difficult resources that are available to them. It operates in over 100 languages and it's 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

I want to just also mention that there are a lot of services there in terms of government and legal services, health care, homelessness, housing, income support, mental health and addictions, newcomer support, older adults, youth, aboriginal, abuse and assault, child and family services, community programs, disabilities, emergency crisis services, employment and training, food and francophones. This is really valuable for our communities.

I want to really commend Karen and her whole team who came out to Queen's Park last week to help us to help everybody in our constituencies. I'm looking forward to something that we can add on to our signatures on our emails to let people know of the great service that's being provided.

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FAIR

Mr. Yvan Baker: Today I rise to say thank you to a group of people and organizations that are making a difference in my community in Etobicoke Centre every single day. Every day as MPPs, we all hear from constituents who need our help. Sometimes our staff can assist them directly, but very often we actually connect them with other government or community service organizations that can help provide the support that our constituents need.

Community agencies are often run and funded by volunteers. They provide assistance daily to our constituents, including my own. They are fundamental to the quality of life in all of our ridings, including my riding of Etobicoke Centre. Although these organizations offer very valuable services, many constituents are actually unaware of them, and therefore can't always access the help that they need when they need it. We can all think of instances when constituents in our communities have

reached out to our offices to ask for help in finding local organizations that can support them and address their challenges.

That is why, this past weekend, I, alongside my colleague Peter Milczyn from Etobicoke–Lakeshore, organized the annual government and community services fair at Cloverdale Mall in Etobicoke. The fair created a space for over 100 exhibitors, consisting of community service organizations and government agencies. We managed to attract thousands of people. Over 3,000 came to the event on Saturday. The fair allowed my constituents to learn more about these organizations and what they do.

I rise today to thank the exhibitors, not only for participating in the fair, but for dedicating themselves to serving my constituents, making our community a better place to live and making a difference in Etobicoke Centre every single day.

FLOODING IN CHATHAM-KENT AND THAMESVILLE

Mr. Monte McNaughton: On Friday, a state of emergency was declared in the area of Chatham-Kent and Thamesville as the Thames River overflowed its banks, causing flooding and damage to homes and businesses.

Water levels rose quickly. While gas was shut off in the area and a voluntary evacuation was initiated, some families woke up on Saturday morning to find they were unable to leave their flooded homes. Fire crews, dive teams and EMS worked to rescue these folks and protect the community, even as their own homes were endangered. Thankfully, fire, police, paramedics, municipal officials and utility services worked incredibly well together to coordinate an efficient response.

It wasn't just the first responders who rose to the occasion. I have heard many stories now about volunteers turning up at fire stations offering to help with evacuations, stories of neighbours helping neighbours and people checking in on and assisting the elderly and vulnerable. These are close-knit communities that I know will continue to work together through the recovery. I have been in contact with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and his office, and I hope he will continue to work with local officials to ensure that municipal services are quickly restored and that people affected by this flood are able to return to their homes with as little delay and difficulty as possible.

Again, I want to thank Mayor Hope, the first responders and volunteers. I don't think we could have hoped for a better response to this unfortunate situation.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I beg leave to present a report on the pre-budget consultations, 2018, from the Standing

Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs and move the adoption of its recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Ms. Hoggarth presents the committee's report and moves the adoption of its recommendations.

Does the member wish to make a brief statement?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs conducted its pre-budget consultations in December and January. Public hearings were held in Toronto, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo and Windsor.

The committee heard 123 presentations and received over 80 additional written submissions from agencies, associations, community groups, local administrative bodies, municipalities, organizations, unions and individuals. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank each and every one of them for taking the time to share their views with the committee.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee and the committee staff for their commitment, hard work and co-operation.

With that, I move adjournment of the debate.

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

Debate adjourned.

PETITIONS

ANTI-SMOKING INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH

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

“Whereas:

“—In the past 10 years in Ontario, 86% of all movies with on-screen smoking were rated for youth;

“—The tobacco industry has a long, well-documented history of promoting tobacco use on-screen;

“—A scientific report released by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit estimated that 185,000 children in Ontario today will be recruited to smoking by exposure to on-screen smoking;

“—More than 59,000 will eventually die from tobacco-related cancers, strokes, heart disease and emphysema, incurring at least \$1.1 billion in health care costs; and whereas an adult rating (18A) for movies that promote on-screen tobacco in Ontario would save at least 30,000 lives and half a billion health care dollars;

“—The Ontario government has a stated goal to achieve the lowest smoking rates in Canada;

“—79% of Ontarians support not allowing smoking in movies rated G, PG, 14A (increased from 73% in 2011);

“—The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has the authority to amend the regulations of the Film Classification Act via cabinet;

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

"—To request the Standing Committee on Government Agencies examine the ways in which the regulations of the Film Classification Act could be amended to reduce smoking in youth-rated films released in Ontario;

"—That the committee report back on its findings to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and that the Minister of Government and Consumer Services prepare a response."

I support this. I will affix my name to it and give to page Michael to bring to the Clerk.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the government first promised a legislated care standard for residents in the province's long-term-care homes in 2003, but are yet to make good on their promise;

"Whereas the Long-Term Care Homes Act 2007 empowered the provincial government to create a minimum standard;

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

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

"To legislate a care standard of a minimum four hours per resident each day, adjusted for acuity level and case mix."

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

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GOVERNMENT SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank the people of Valley East for signing this petition, including Jamie Kensley. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Valley East's privately operated ServiceOntario centre closed abruptly in January 2018; and

"Whereas the people of Valley East have the right to reliable business hours and reasonable wait times; and

"Whereas the people of Valley East have the right to a full range of services in both English and French; and

"Whereas the people of Valley East pay the same provincial taxes as other Ontarians and have the right to equal services;"

Therefore, they petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"That the Minister of Government and Consumer Services instruct ServiceOntario to immediately and permanently open and staff a public ServiceOntario centre in Valley East."

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

SENIORS' HEALTH SERVICES

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

"Whereas the Residential Tenancies Act protects tenants in dwellings, long-term-care homes and retirement homes from sudden and unfair increases to their rent; and

"Whereas additional costs such as the provision of meals and other services are not subject to the said act; and

"Whereas there have been episodes of repeated, large and unjustified increases to the stated costs of meal provisioning in Cornwall and area; and

"Whereas residents do not have a say in the procurement and administration of meals and other services provided by the facility, nor can they opt out of such services when notified of an increase in charges, being thus committed to a 'take it or leave it' choice;

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

"(1) To instruct the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to enact regulations ensuring fairness, protection and choice for residents of retirement homes and long-term-care facilities that provide any other necessary services such as, but not limited to, meals and personal assistance at an extra cost to their residents;

"(2) To instruct the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to undertake a comprehensive review of the administration of retirement homes and long-term-care facilities with respect to the provision of services other than lodging that involve an extra charge to residents."

I'm happy to affix my signature and give it to page Ricky.

INJURED WORKERS

Miss Monique Taylor: It is my honour to read this petition on behalf of thousands of injured workers across Ontario. It reads as follows: "Workers' Comp Is a Right.

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas about 200,000 to 300,000 people in Ontario are injured on the job every year;

"Whereas over a century ago, workers in Ontario who were injured on the job gave up the right to sue their employers, in exchange for a system that would provide them with just compensation;

"Whereas decades of cost-cutting have pushed injured workers into poverty and onto publicly funded social assistance programs, and have gradually curtailed the rights of injured workers;

"Whereas injured workers have the right to quality and timely medical care, compensation for lost wages, and protection from discrimination;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to change the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act to accomplish the following for injured workers in Ontario:

“Eliminate the practice of ‘deeming’ or ‘determining,’ which bases compensation on phantom jobs that injured workers do not actually have;

“Ensure that the WSIB prioritizes and respects the medical opinions of the health care providers who treat the injured worker directly;

“Prevent compensation from being reduced or denied based on ‘pre-existing conditions’ that never affected the worker’s ability to function prior to the work injury.”

I couldn’t agree with this petition more. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to page Theebana to bring to the Clerk.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

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

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

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

“Whereas home heating and electricity are essential for families in rural Ontario who cannot afford to continue footing the bill for the government’s mismanagement;

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

I agree with this and will pass it off to page Harry.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Sandra Moors from Naughton in my riding for signing this petition. It reads as follows:

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

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

LYME DISEASE

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

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

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

“Whereas the public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process of establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

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

“To request that the Minister of Health direct that the Ontario public health system and OHIP include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis and to have everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

Of course I agree, and I affix my signature and give it to page Heather.

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Miss Monique Taylor: I am pleased to read this petition on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of families desperate for services in this province and from the Ontario Disability Coalition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we need you to break down the barriers that are depriving many children and youth with all disabilities access to ongoing and continuous therapy to improve their quality of life to promote their independence;

“Whereas children and youth with all disabilities should be able to access quality therapy that is parent/caregiver directed. All children and youth with disabilities must have access to needed hands-on therapy

such as physiotherapy, occupational, speech and language, augmentative communication and vision therapy;

“Whereas parents should be able to purchase therapy through a direct-funding model;

“Whereas there should be a transparent process for accessing therapy through the children’s treatment centres;

“Whereas all additional investments in children’s treatment centres should maximize front-line services and reduce excess management costs;

“Whereas parents should be able to access an independent appeal process;

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

“As currently many children and youth are being deprived of necessary therapies, which result in adverse long-term health effects, we are pleading with you to address this immediately;

“Urge the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to provide the necessary and required therapy to children and youth with all disabilities on a consistent and ongoing basis, with a choice of direct-funding model, to fulfill the government’s commitment to support all children to allow these services to increase their ability to participate fully at home, school and in the community.”

I affix my name to this and give it to page Aashaz to bring to the Clerk.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: In light of my private member’s bill, Putting Ticks on the Map, I am very pleased to present the following petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

“Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process for establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives at 45% to 95% of the time;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct the Ontario public health system and OHIP to include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for

acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians.”

I totally agree with this petition. I’ll affix my signature and send it to the table with Ricky.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank M. Fournier from my riding for signing this petition that reads as follows:

“Whereas frail elderly patients needing long-term-care placement in homes within the North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN) have been pressured to move out of the hospital to await placement, or stay and pay hospital rates of approximately \$1,000 per day; and

“Whereas frail elderly patients needing long-term-care placement in Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie have been pressured to move to homes not of their choosing, or to ‘interim’ beds in facilities that don’t meet legislated standards for permanent long-term-care homes; and

“Whereas the practice of making patients remain in ‘interim’ beds is contrary to Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) policy which identifies ‘interim’ beds as intended to ‘ensure a continuous flow-through so that interim beds are constantly freed up for new applicants from hospitals’;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“—Ensure health system officials are using ‘interim’ beds as ‘flow-through,’ in accordance with fairness and as outlined in MOHLTC policy;

“—Ensure patients aren’t pressured with hospital rates and fulfill promises made to hundreds of nursing home residents who agreed to move temporarily with the promise that they would be relocated as soon as a bed in a home of their choosing became available.”

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

FAIRNESS IN PROCUREMENT ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 SUR L’ÉQUITÉ EN MATIÈRE DE MARCHÉS PUBLICS

Ms. McMahon moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 194, An Act respecting fairness in procurement /
Projet de loi 194, Loi concernant l’équité en matière de marchés publics.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I look to the President of the Treasury Board to lead off the debate.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: I’m pleased to rise in the House today to initiate second reading debate for the proposed Fairness in Procurement Act, 2018. I would

have preferred to be standing in my place in this House last week. Unfortunately, I was somewhat delayed in giving this speech because the official opposition, distracted with some messy infighting, has allowed their internal struggles to impact the work in this House—important work on behalf of the people in Ontario and on behalf of Ontario workers and their families. Instead, they have chosen to delay the debate with procedural tricks and obstructionist delays. However, here we are, and we're glad to be here now. I contrast that with those of us on this side of the House. We are continuing our focus and our intentional work on debating what's important to Ontarians—our work on their behalf—because they share our priority; namely, protecting Ontario businesses and made-in-Ontario jobs.

There has been a resurgence of late in calls for Buy American policies in the United States and at the sub-national, or state, level. Our government is quite concerned with these restrictive policies, which could prevent Ontario-based businesses from participating in certain state government procurement contracts.

Des pratiques d'approvisionnement équitables, ouvertes et concurrentielles sont avantageuses pour tous, de part et d'autre de la frontière. L'accès aux marchés publics crée des emplois et augmente la valeur pour les contribuables.

Last year, New York state put a Buy American provision in its budget. The proposed rules were extremely punitive to Ontario and would have given New York businesses an unfair advantage. Premier Wynne took decisive action and has been proactive in directing her team to work hard to find a diplomatic solution. Some of the most senior ministers in this government went to Albany last year to lobby against this policy and to work proactively and productively to change it.

While we worked through diplomatic channels, Premier Wynne made it very clear that if New York went ahead, there would be consequences. Why, Speaker? Because in every good relationship there is a clear understanding of boundaries and expectations. In fact, it is a common premise that clarity on both sides enhances relationships. So we were very clear from the beginning about our priority: protecting the interests of Ontario companies and workers from potentially punitive decisions. Put simply, Speaker, that's our job. Under the Premier's leadership, we are doing just that.

Initially, New York was receptive; they scaled back the bill. But since that time, they have passed another Buy American bill, a bill that would punish Ontario businesses and Ontario workers. We've responded with this proposed legislation that we are discussing today, using fairness as our guiding principle. The Fairness in Procurement Act enables us to bring in responsive regulations to respond in proportion to states that aren't treating our businesses and our workers fairly.

The New York Buy American Act was signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo on December 15, 2017. This legislation could prevent Ontario iron from being supplied for public works contracts over \$1 million for

surface roads or bridges. If Ontario is not exempted from this legislation, the requirements could take effect on April 1, 2018. We have told our US partners that the protectionist road they are going down is not in the interests of either their businesses or ours, and we have made the point that we believe in free and fair trade.

We in Ontario know that open borders and co-operation with our neighbours make us more competitive, and when we are more competitive, we can create more good jobs for our workers. In 2015-16, nearly \$160 million worth of Ontario government contracts went to New York state businesses. This is about government procurement, Speaker, not trade. I want to emphasize that point.

Nous parlons de marchés publics, et pas d'échanges commerciaux.

Right now in Ontario, we are investing an historic \$190 billion to build up our roads, our schools, our hospitals—writ large, our infrastructure. Jurisdictions around the world are watching, dare I say with admiration, as Ontario plays “catch up to keep up” after years of underinvestment, whether it be in our hydroelectric infrastructure, our roads, our bridges or our hospitals—including, I am proud to say, the brand new Joseph Brant Hospital in Burlington—all investments that are creating jobs and growing our economy.

That's what is at stake for New York—their ability to participate in our enormous efforts to build infrastructure and create jobs here at home. Premier Wynne and our team have worked diligently through diplomatic channels to find a resolution. She has personally met with 33 state governors. She has met with congresspeople, senators and members of the US federal administration. Two weeks ago in Washington, she met with members of the House ways and means committee, the US chief negotiator on NAFTA, and the vice-president's chief economist.

We've had these conversations, but it doesn't end there. We need to make sure we have the tools at hand to act quickly to protect Ontario jobs if we need to. That's why our government is proposing legislation to provide Ontario with the capacity and the ability to take measured actions in response to discriminatory procurement practices implemented by US states. It is the right and responsible thing to do as the largest subnational in the country.

Le gouvernement propose une loi qui habilitera l'Ontario à prendre des mesures proportionnées en réponse aux politiques d'approvisionnement discriminatoires des États américains.

The US has a lengthy history of imposing Buy American policies nationally and at the state level. The previous administration included Buy American policies in its 2009 stimulus package, and certain US Department of Transportation agencies, such as the Federal Aviation Administration and the Federal Transit Administration, require US steel and manufactured products to be used in certain projects.

Ontario has played an instrumental role in previous federal-provincial-territorial efforts to counteract Buy

American policies. This has resulted in Ontario gaining permanent access to procurement in many states—an important win for Ontario businesses and workers.

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The new US administration's support for Buy American has placed much more emphasis on these policies at a state level, which is what we are now experiencing in Texas and in New York state. Buy American proposals are also being considered in other states, including Maine and New Jersey. So proportional responses are a very important way of being very intentional about our priority: protecting Ontario business interests and Ontario jobs.

Mr. Speaker, our close relationship with many US states is measured beyond the value of goods and services that flow between our borders. It is a relationship that relies on its deeply intertwined economies. Take Michigan: We build cars together. That's how our auto sector is able to compete with the world and support hundreds of thousands of jobs. As the daughter of an auto worker and someone who worked in the Chrysler minivan plant growing up in Windsor, I understand and appreciate both the contribution of our auto sector to our economy and the importance of those jobs to Ontario workers and their families. As the MPP for Burlington, I have a number of companies in my riding that are part of the automotive supply chain, as advanced manufacturers.

Speaker, our government understands the importance of these relationships to the economy and to our workers. As a consequence, Premier Wynne has met with Governor Rick Snyder and signed two memoranda of understanding, or MOUs, to increase collaboration in our auto sector. Last summer, as a result of that MOU, we completed North America's first cross-border autonomous vehicle trip, from Detroit to Windsor to Traverse City, Michigan.

During this time of uncertainty and rising protectionist sentiment, Ontario is working together with our American friends to take the auto sector into the 21st century. We are showing that we are stronger together, and we are building the kind of partnerships that we'll need to weather the storms ahead.

Let's get back to Ontario and New York state: When it comes to our economies, both benefit enormously from a strong and integrated partnership that supports good jobs on both sides of the border.

Un solide partenariat intégré entre l'Ontario et l'État de New York est extrêmement bénéfique pour les économies des deux territoires et maintient de bons emplois des deux côtés de la frontière.

Open access to other markets is key for job creation and growth for Ontario. Our government will continue to advocate in this regard, emphasizing to our partners south of the border the importance of reciprocal access to government procurement projects, and actively advocate for an exemption from other Buy American policies that may be proposed in the future. In the absence of any legislative means to address Buy American policies, these New York-based suppliers, and many more, could

continue to access Ontario government procurements while Ontario-based suppliers could be shut out of the New York state marketplace unless they use US-made steel and iron. So it's clear there is a lot riding on our relationship with New York state, not to mention all of the other US subnational jurisdictions that could follow their lead by implementing similar Buy American policies.

Mr. Speaker, the success of Ontario's economy, both now and in the future, is deeply intertwined with that of our US neighbour. In fact, this inextricable relationship sets the context for taking decisive and appropriate steps to ensure the relationship's success. We believe that joint participation in one another's procurement processes helps our citizens on both sides of the border to live better lives. We can and should have better access to the best companies have to offer.

At a time when advancements in technology are blurring borders and creating a global economy, it does not make any sense to regress into a world of protectionist philosophy. And so it is with some reluctance that we take these steps. And in a moment I will speak to the degree to which our legislative course of action is widely supported by important sectors and actors in the Ontario economy.

As a consequence of recent developments, our government cannot and will not stand idly by and have Ontario businesses discriminated against. While we do not think it is optimal, we want the world to know we are ready and we are willing to respond in kind. This is the right and the just thing to do, and it underscores the fact that we are fully committed to standing up for Ontario workers and Ontario businesses.

As I've said earlier, over the past year our government has stepped up its efforts to ensure that US state leaders understand Ontario's concerns. To that end, Premier Wynne, Minister of Economic Development and Growth Steven Del Duca and Minister of International Trade Michael Chan have been actively meeting with officials in states that either already have Buy American provisions—for example, New York state and Texas—or are considering them.

We've heard some unreasonable criticism from the opposition, saying that they wouldn't go this far to support Ontario businesses. They've suggested that we should try talking to our southern neighbours. Speaker, this would suggest that they have not been paying attention to the focused and determined actions of Ontario ministers and our Premier, meeting with American subnational leaders to discuss issues of mutual interest and concern; namely, the important free trade and procurement practices between our two jurisdictions. I can assure this House and Ontario workers, however, that while the opposition may be otherwise distracted, our sense of purpose is very clear.

To be fair, the opposition has been distracted with other things recently, but that's why I'm pleased to remind our colleagues opposite of the leadership and hard work that have gone into this government's relation-

ship with our American neighbours as we continue our work on these critical relationships. I am pleased to remind those of us who might be otherwise focused of the 33 governors whom Premier Wynne has met with, and the countless other meetings that have taken place and will continue to take place.

The temporary Leader of the Opposition is a veteran when it comes to not supporting Ontario workers. He has bragged about his letter-writing campaign back in 2009, when the US first introduced Buy American provisions. We all know that the world has dramatically changed since then, both politically and economically. While the interim leader would choose to send a quick letter and hope for the best, our government will fight for Ontario workers every single time.

Indeed, working together with our partners, we will continue our advocacy efforts in New York state in the lead-up to April 1, when the Buy American legislation comes into force. But in the meantime, our government is taking steps to protect our province's economic interests now precisely because that's what leadership is: discerning the appropriate actions and then acting in our province's best interests. That's what leadership is.

When there are restrictions that inhibit or prevent Ontario businesses from participating or succeeding in public procurement, our government is seeking the authority, through the House, to respond proportionately through the proposed Fairness in Procurement Act, 2018.

If passed, the proposed legislation would allow Ontario to take measured action to respond to discriminatory procurement practices. Through the proposed legislation, the government hopes to discourage similar Buy American policies from US subnational jurisdictions, both at the state and local level.

Avec la loi proposée, le gouvernement espère décourager des politiques « Buy American » semblables émanant d'administrations américaines de compétence internationale, tant au niveau de l'État qu'au niveau local.

The responsive legislation would be limited to the offending state, so it would not target suppliers from other jurisdictions and it would focus on procurement. It is designed to discourage other US subnational jurisdictions, both at the state and local level, from considering similar Buy American provisions.

If passed, the proposed legislation would give Ontario the flexibility to choose whether and how to respond to these actions by providing the authority to make regulations. These responsive regulations, if made, could be pursued, in instances where a US jurisdiction enacts legislation or adopts a discriminatory policy that may inhibit or prevent Ontario suppliers from participating or succeeding in procurement processes initiated by purchasers from the offending US jurisdiction, and provide specific parameters for action.

In terms of how the process could work, once it became clear that a US jurisdiction would be implementing a policy that, in the minister's opinion, may inhibit or prevent an Ontario supplier from participating

or succeeding in procurement processes initiated by purchasers in the offending US jurisdiction, a responsive regulation could be developed.

As President of the Treasury Board, I would then provide cabinet with details such as:

- the specific US subnational policy and how it could impact Ontario;
- the kinds of reciprocal measures the government would be considering;
- the entities to which the regulation would apply;
- the date the regulation would take effect; and
- how the government would communicate its intent to revoke the regulation should the offending jurisdiction remove its policy or provide Ontario suppliers with an exemption.

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This important analysis allows us to respond proportionately and sensibly to a given circumstance.

Once the regulation is in force, prescribed Ontario entities would begin following the established procurement measures, which may include excluding companies from offending American subnational jurisdictions from competing on certain procurements.

The regulation could also be revoked in the event that the jurisdiction in question removed its protectionist policy or provided Ontario suppliers with an exemption.

The responsive regulations, if made, could apply to a range of Ontario government and broader public sector entities, such as ministries, hospitals or universities. At a high level, impacted provincial government entities could include ministries, provincial agencies, the Independent Electricity System Operator and Ontario Power Generation Inc. and each of its subsidiaries. Affected broader public sector entities could include public hospitals, school boards, colleges and universities, and group purchasing organizations.

The proposed legislation would allow the government to add other entities through regulation as seen fit. This means that, should a responsive regulation be developed, the government could prescribe other entities as appropriate.

It is important to note that the proposed legislation would not establish any obligations on the impacted entities until such time as a responsive regulation was established.

The proposed legislation would establish the authority to create regulations that could allow for exemptions in certain cases. Procuring entities in Ontario could receive a waiver from the restrictions imposed in the regulation. Should a broader public sector, or BPS, entity enter into a contract that contravenes the legislation or a responsive regulation, the proposed legislation provides that the contract would be void unless the minister responsible validates it. Specific sanctions for BPS entities that contravene the legislation or regulation could also be included in responsive regulations.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that this is not about trade; this is about government procurement. As I

mentioned, the proposed legislation is enabling and does not establish any obligations.

It is also important to note that while the proposed legislation would provide the government with the ability to act, it would not require it to do so. On its own, the legislation wouldn't functionally do anything unless we decided to take action under it.

We remain optimistic that constructive discussion can continue to deepen the relationship we have with our closest neighbours. However, having the proposed legislation in place will support and ensure the fair treatment of Ontario businesses and Ontario workers. In fact, Ontario's procurement policy framework promotes value for money through the application of competitive processes that are open, fair and transparent.

On average, the government of Ontario does business with 52,000 vendors annually. Strong requirements are built into the policy framework to promote integrity in our procurement processes. These include mandatory policy requirements to express procurement specifications in generic and functional terms, to remove bias against or for any vendor; mandatory disclosure requirements, including disclosure of evaluation methodology, to support fair, open and transparent procurements; and a formal bid dispute process so that vendor concerns about procurement processes and contract award decisions can be addressed in an open and transparent way.

It is clear that openness, transparency and, most importantly, equality are at the heart of our government's procurement framework.

To be very clear, we do not want to escalate this matter. We only want what is fair. This legislation allows us to create a fair playing field by mirroring whatever discriminatory practices are applied by our US neighbours, should it become necessary to do so.

Speaker, our colleagues on the other side of the House must be feeling a little lonely these days as they work to delay this important legislation and delay our efforts to protect Ontario businesses and Ontario jobs, because that is not a position that is broadly supported. I say this because we've had important partners to our government, key stakeholders, voice their support for these efforts. They include Dennis Darby, president and CEO of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, who said:

"CME is pleased the government of Ontario is standing up for Ontario's manufacturers by introducing retaliatory measures to unfair procurement practices.

"We wish that this kind of legislation wasn't necessary between two countries with such a long history of trade and co-operation like the US and Canada.

"But too often US federal and state governments enact or threaten to enact measures to block our manufacturers from exporting goods and services into their procurement markets.

"It is also a critical reminder of how important it is that government procurement issues are dealt with in the ongoing NAFTA renegotiations."

And this from Jerry Dias, Unifor national president:

"Managing public procurement in a way that bolsters local economic development is an important policy tool for governments, at all levels.

"But the federal and state administrators in the US have perfected the art of abusing those tools, effectively closing off Canadian suppliers from entire projects—especially in iron and steel.

"Ontario's bold move today sends an important message that strengthening cross-border relations cannot be a one-way street."

Here's what the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario had to say:

"Ontario workers need a government that will stand up for them against discriminatory practices.

"Fighting for a level playing field will allow our province's economy to grow and create the jobs of the future. The Fairness in Procurement Act is a step in the right direction."

Kalyan Ghosh, the CEO of Algoma, said this:

"Algoma is a strong advocate of free and fair trade.

"As the North American steel industry is highly integrated, open and competitive access is in the best interest of all businesses and communities across the supply chain."

Todd Letts, the CEO of the Brampton Board of Trade, said:

"Ontario requires flexibility for responsive action to American protectionist policies.

"The Brampton Board of Trade advises caution and proportional response. Protectionism costs everyone—in New York, Texas and Ontario.

"Consumers and taxpayers on both sides of the border end up paying more for public construction projects like roads and bridges, when bids are compromised by protectionist policy. There are no winners in trade disputes."

And Christian Provenzano, the mayor of Sault Ste. Marie, said:

"It is important that the province of Ontario takes this measure to protect Ontario's industry from unfair or discriminatory procurement practices.

"It is important to recognize that such practices can have very negative consequences for communities like Sault Ste. Marie. While US steel comes over the border and is used here on a daily basis, Canadian steel shouldn't be prejudiced. If it is, our government has to be in a position to respond."

And another, this time from the Whitby Chamber of Commerce: "Anything that could restrict our members' access to different markets is concerning. That's why the Whitby Chamber of Commerce welcomes the government's proposed Fairness in Procurement Act. This kind of legislation may encourage all parties to keep the trade doors open, which will benefit businesses on both sides of the border."

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, this proposed legislation is broadly supported by key stakeholders across this province, both employers and workers alike. So I'm not sure what the PC Party will have to say to those people

and those organizations about why they felt it was reasonable and appropriate to block this Legislature's efforts to protect them.

Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude by reiterating that the government of Ontario is committed to maintaining fair and accessible procurement practices. We will continue to lobby for an exemption to New York state's policy in order to strengthen and promote Ontario's long-standing business relationships. Defending the interests of Ontario businesses operating in other markets is part of Ontario's plan to create jobs, grow its economy and help people in their everyday lives.

Défendre les intérêts des entreprises de l'Ontario qui exercent des activités dans d'autres marchés fait partie de notre plan visant à créer des emplois, à stimuler notre économie et à améliorer la vie quotidienne de notre population.

Speaker, our plan is working. With the fastest-growing economy in the G7 and the lowest unemployment rates in 17 years, under the leadership of our Premier, Kathleen Wynne, Ontario is not only open for business, but jurisdictions around the world know it too, which is why Ontario is the leading jurisdiction in North America in terms of foreign direct investment.

As the saying goes, "Good things grow in Ontario," and we intend to ensure that they continue to do so. And so our government will continue to advocate on behalf of Ontario workers and businesses and seek ways to strengthen and promote our long-standing business relationship.

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Le gouvernement continuera de défendre les intérêts des travailleurs et des entreprises de l'Ontario et de trouver des moyens de renforcer et promouvoir nos relations commerciales de longue date.

We believe the proposed legislation sends a strong signal about our government's commitment to defending the interests of Ontario businesses and Ontario workers operating in other markets.

I encourage all members of this House to support this important legislation. Join us in standing up for Ontario businesses and Ontario workers. It is the right and the just thing to do.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today and add a few comments.

I think that we all want to do what's good for Ontario. We want our workers to have jobs and we want to be competitive. I don't think that this government has made strides in terms of making us more competitive or making our workers more competitive and well-trained. We heard this morning in question period that we have a lot of companies that are looking for skilled workers and they're not able to find them here in Ontario, and that's a challenge. We have trade disagreements between provinces that we need all the provinces to work on alleviating and—oh, I'm in my old seat.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Yes. I've been advised that you need to move to the new seat. You can continue.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I felt so comfortable in that seat, and now I know why.

As I was saying, we need to do more between the provinces to have free trade between the provinces. We know we have disagreements with Quebec about, specifically, the construction trade. We're seeing what's going on between Alberta and BC in terms of pipelines and wine. We need to work with our counterparts and the federal government. I think that's what's missing from all of the discussion this morning: Where is the federal government in all of this? If we need to work with our US counterparts both at the state level and the US federal government level, where are our federal government partners helping us to achieve that?

Again, we're seeing another bill from this government with the word "fairness" in it. I think there are a lot of people out there in Ontario who don't feel that anything has been fair for them and their families. They would like some real fairness, not just a bunch of words on acts saying "fairness."

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand and, today, to provide a couple of minutes in response to the President of the Treasury Board. I'm going to be doing my lead in a little while, so I don't want to waste all my ammunition, but the president made a comment—and I listened intently—that Ontario is the number one jurisdiction for foreign direct investment. She followed that up with the commonly known tag line, very well known: "Good things grow in Ontario."

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: Sing it.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm not going to sing it.

But there is a concern. I don't know about the rest of rural Ontario, but in my part of rural Ontario, there is a concern regarding foreign direct investment in agricultural land, because he or she who controls the land, controls the food supply.

The only reason I'm bringing this up is because the president brought it up in a flippant comment. I'm not being critical, but it gives an opportunity to talk about something that is of serious concern, perhaps as serious as procurement—because in the long-term success of this province and success of the people of this province is food security. The fact that we have no controls on who actually controls the land, whether it be foreign control or conglomerate control, the fact that that is happening as we speak, is also something that needs to be addressed. Not only are we losing our land to pavement, but we're losing control of our land, and that's something that this House should address.

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

Mr. Norm Miller: It's a pleasure to have a chance to comment on the speech from the President of the Treasury Board on this Bill 194, An Act respecting

fairness in procurement. There's that word "fairness" again that this government seems to like to use so often.

The member, in her speech, talked about the fact that the US is becoming more protectionist and that they support free and fair trade. I support free and fair trade as well, but I am not sure how escalating things—as this bill seems to be a tit-for-tat sort of bill—is going to be beneficial for the province of Ontario for jobs in Ontario. I heard in the minister's speech her mention that there are no winners in trade disputes. I would agree with that, so I just don't see how us escalating things actually is going to be of benefit. I suspect this is more about politics than anything else.

What I'm hearing in my riding certainly is that business needs to be supported. There's a huge lack, as was mentioned by my colleague, of skilled workers. I know companies like Connor Industries in Parry Sound, which builds Stanley aluminum boats—world-class boats shipped all over the world—that's one of their biggest challenges: finding welders and that kind of thing.

I attended, last Thursday, the Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association annual meeting that was held at Deerhurst Resort in Muskoka. Over the course of their evening, that was a huge issue for them as well.

I think we need to support Ontario business. We need to put in policies that are going to make our businesses competitive. We've seen policies like high electricity rates and more and more regulations and red tape making it really challenging for businesses to compete. I think we need to support those businesses; I just don't see any benefit from this bill other than it's going to escalate and make more of a trade war out of what's going on.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I want to respond to both of the members opposite who have spoken in response to Bill 194—but particularly that there's a notion that this bill would escalate, because in fact, the bill has been specifically drafted so that it is not an escalation tool. It is a response which is precisely proportionate to the Buy American legislation that a state or a municipality has already put in place.

To be totally clear, Speaker, the way this bill works is that if a state government puts in place Buy American legislation that prevents Ontario manufacturers, Ontario producers and Ontario businesses from selling things to that state and to that state government when it goes to buy IT or infrastructure, that if a state has already done that, Ontario would have the ability to respond in exactly the same way.

This is not an escalation. This is simply saying that if, for example, a US state says that you can never buy steel from a plant in Hamilton or a plant in Sault Ste. Marie, we would be able to say, "Do you know what? You, Ontario person, who is using Ontario taxpayers' money to build infrastructure, can't buy steel from that state." That's how this bill would work.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I believe that's four questions and comments. We return to the President of the Treasury Board to reply.

Hon. Eleanor McMahon: As always, I'm pleased to hear comments from all sides of the House on this critically important issue. I hopefully set the tone for our government's approach to this important issue, which, again, is focused on protecting Ontario jobs, Ontario businesses and Ontario workers.

I appreciated the comments from both the member from Thornhill, the MPP from Timiskaming–Cochrane, who is a vibrant and important voice in the area of agriculture—he mentioned food security, and I couldn't agree more. But as the member from Guelph mentioned, this is all about procurement and not about trade. I think there's an important difference in those two things.

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While members opposite have referenced issues like escalation—the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka, who talked about how we need to apply caution. We agree. This is not about escalation, for that very reason. This is about a proportional response, Speaker. It's important that we keep these things in mind.

There are no winners in trade disputes, as I mentioned in my remarks. Of course, we're working closely in partnership with the federal government on the NAFTA negotiations. We continue to assert and affirm Ontario's interests in that regard.

Thank you for the time to respond today, Mr. Speaker. I'm enjoying the debate and I look forward to seeing the bill pass in very short order.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to be able to join the debate today, on behalf of my amazing riding of Huron–Bruce and on behalf of the PC caucus and our party, to speak to this particular government legislation.

The act respecting fairness in procurement is a response to the recent anti-trade sentiment and laws we have seen south of the border. We agree that it is important that we take all reasonable steps to keep Ontario's businesses competitive and to make sure Ontario's businesses have fair access to markets all over the world, but I would like to ask the government an important question right out of the gate: Why are we debating this bill right now? If you were expecting New York to implement their legislation for the past year, why did we not pursue this legislation last fall? In fact, we know that 10 months ago, in April 2017, your cabinet met to discuss a bill that would allow the government to hand down its proportional response to states implementing Buy American laws, but it took 10 months for the bill to be tabled, coincidentally—or not so coincidentally—right before an election.

Now, the Premier tried to pin last week's reasoned amendment as an inappropriate tactic, but I want to talk about that, Speaker. Let's take a look at the facts. This is the reality we deal with as the loyal opposition.

Fact number 1: The government did not reach out to my office—not once—to discuss their bill. They did not indicate that they wanted to work with the opposition, and not once in the 10 months since they had taken this

bill to cabinet last spring did they even mention a word of a briefing. Now, we're not shocked by this behaviour, but we would like to call a spade a spade.

Next, the government indicated on February 6 that they would be tabling the bill within two weeks. Immediately, I instructed my office to reach out for a briefing or at least an embargoed draft copy of the bill. We did not receive our draft copy of the bill until February 20. Ladies and gentlemen, that was just minutes before it was tabled; and then we received our briefing the next morning, just hours ahead of the leadoff debates.

The government said they are willing to work with us on trade but, really and truly, their actions are speaking so much more strongly than words. They have no intent in working with any of us on the opposition side of this House. The fact that they would not allow us to do our due diligence on the bill indicates their unwillingness to include us in the discussion at all.

The Premier claims to want to work with all parties to pass this legislation, but as I mentioned just moments ago, actions speak louder than words, and through their actions we have seen no willingness of government to cooperate with any party in the House.

In the 10 months since the Premier's cabinet met and contemplated this legislation and the day it was tabled, we heard absolutely nothing. So I would just like to recommend that in the future, should the government wish to debate a bill a day after it is tabled, perhaps share a draft of the bill with us and give us a briefing ahead of time. To me, that constitutes wanting to work together. This would allow us in opposition to ask the important questions ahead of time and could have prevented our reasoned amendment last week. And that reasoned amendment contained an incredibly valid question that the government has yet to answer, and that question is, why? Why is this legislation needed?

What is currently stopping the government of the day in their authority to procure goods and services from directing government entities and broader public sector entities to select bidders that reflect preferences on trade and procurement? We are still waiting, Speaker, for a satisfactory answer.

In fact, the Auditor General's report from 2017 reminded us that Infrastructure Ontario was not tracking how many vendors bid on capital projects and which vendors were winning the bids. In fact, Speaker, Infrastructure Ontario—and I quote from the auditor's report—"allowed its external project managers to select vendors from its vendor-of-record list and manually add them to the list of bidders." Some 321 projects worth \$49 million were selected this way.

If managers can hand-pick vendors, why can't the government just tell these managers to exclude New York-based vendors when they do their hand-picking next time? We still do not know why this issue actually needs legislation.

But let's get to their supposed justification for this bill. The government believes it will ensure that Ontario businesses remain competitive. Really? There's so much we can talk about in that regard, but right now, let's talk

about what the government has chosen not to prioritize in terms of Ontario businesses and helping them to be competitive. They have done the exact opposite. For the past 15 years, the competitiveness of Ontario businesses has been compromised by reckless policy after reckless policy by this Liberal government. This is particularly acute in the manufacturing sector and with small businesses.

Where do we begin, Speaker? There is such a huge list, but let's start with what is still topical and a number one topic of conversation throughout Ontario: electricity. We have seen electricity prices go through the roof. We have seen Bill 148 and its provisions that many businesses claimed would hurt their ability to compete, and we have seen countless policies from this government that make life more unaffordable for employers and employees, draining resources from our economy. Over the past 15 years, Ontario has lost its competitive advantage to the United States, and the Wynne team and their policies are responsible for this.

In fact, we just need to look back to the 2018 Ontario Economic Report from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, which was released this month. Speaker, in it you will find some disturbing trends. For example, 77% of Ontario businesses say that access to talent has an impact on their competitiveness. For instance, time and again, Speaker, I have stood in this House talking about the concern that Ontario's agri-food industry has. The gap in terms of jobs waiting for graduates once was three to one, but just this past fall it was recognized that there are now four jobs for every graduate in the agri-food industry. We have a serious concern on our hands.

Another example of how this province is turning a blind eye and causing our Ontario businesses to be uncompetitive is that 67% of small businesses surveyed said that red tape and the cost of navigating regulation factors into their competitiveness. Another 63% cited the cost of electricity as a major impediment to their competitiveness.

Speaker, just the other day, 62% of Ontario Chamber of Commerce members were reported as being worried about the provincial economy. Why is the government not worried?

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business spoke to an environment of "frustration and despair."

In the government's 15 years of power, they have not yet addressed the much more important issue of competitiveness. We have seen this government take limited action to actually alleviate the skills gap in Ontario. We have yet to see meaningful action in lowering electricity prices from this government. Speaker, this government has failed to rein in the excessive red tape dogging businesses from one corner of the province to the other, but when the low-hanging fruit comes along—a Buy American bill—they are more than willing to claim they are champions for businesses across Ontario. And Ontarians are not buying it.

This government uses a common tactic. We've seen it time and again from embattled politicians around the world.

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When policies cause economic harm, embattled governments find an outside enemy in a flailing attempt to gain votes. In other words, Bill 94—I'll repeat myself and correct my record: Bill 194—is just a distraction. It's not what Ontarians deserve, Speaker. As I mentioned in my leadoff question this morning, Bill 194 is merely reckless politics. I'll repeat that: Bill 194 is just reckless politics and absolutely not good public policy.

In fact, this could even be pointless public policy. Chapter 10 of NAFTA directly references subnational procurement. In fact, since NAFTA was originally agreed to, the Obama administration and the Harper government also reached an agreement on subnational procurement on a smaller scale. This is why we are party to the World Trade Organization Agreement on Government Procurement.

NAFTA is currently being renegotiated, and this topic could be raised again. So I ask: Why are we debating this right now, when those negotiations are ongoing? Have we not seen and learned from the rhetoric coming from the United States and the negativity that it has generated? This government is merely choosing to be provocative and to risk further retaliation for the sake of this Premier's desire to score cheap political points.

We have been told that this will be a proportional response, or that we will respond in kind. But we have seen no evidence that this will be a requirement under the legislation. It is important to note, for those watching this debate on Bill 194 right now, that a threshold that limits government's response is completely missing from this bill. Again, like time and time before, we see legislation get rushed and they get it wrong. This government gets it wrong so many times.

Imagine for a moment what would happen if a government that was against trade was elected in Ontario and given the authority to retaliate with no limit written into the law. Speaker, I don't know about you, but to me and many Ontarians—in fact, the majority of Ontarians—we see that as a recipe for disaster.

I invite government members to read the bill if you haven't already done so—and everyone else in the House, for that matter. Read as well the government releases associated with Bill 194. The omission of thresholds is a glaring flaw that is right there in the open.

In her press release, we found the Premier's perspective on a potential threshold for retaliation against an American state. It reads: "The Premier has consistently said that she will respond to any Buy American laws that cause unfair harm to Ontario workers and businesses."

The bill, in fact, reads: "The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations designating an American jurisdiction as an offending American jurisdiction if, in the minister's opinion, the government of the American jurisdiction has enacted legislation or ... measures that may inhibit or prevent Ontario suppliers from participating or succeeding in procurement processes."

This bill is left entirely to the whims of this Premier and her cabinet. Right now, Ontarians are rightfully

wondering, "What existing legislation will this apply to south of the border?" If the government was serious—as they purport to be—on protectionist trade, they might have dealt with this far earlier than just a couple of months before an election.

Right now, I would like to take a pause and thank the legislative library for helping me track down many examples of just what is going to be talked about in the days ahead as we debate this legislation with regard to procurement.

We're going to take a trip around the United States, ladies and gentlemen. Let's start with Alabama—Alabama, whose 1965 law mandates that local vendors must be used for the oils, fuels and lubricants required for state highways and bridges. That has been in place, as I mentioned, since 1965, and I can't help but wonder if the minister, the Premier, or a future minister, for that matter, will take a measured and proportional response to Alabama on this law. Speaker, what do you think? Do you think they're really going to do that?

Did you know that in Alaska, Speaker, only Alaskan timber, lumber and manufactured wood products are allowed to be used in state-funded construction projects? This law has been on the books since 1949. I again ask: Will the minister be taking a proportional and measured response to this particular law?

I hope you're seeing a trend here, but I've only got two. There are 48 more to go, or a few more than that.

Alaska also requires a 7% preference for Alaskan agricultural products for all state school board purchases. I question whether the government truly has the time to take a measured response against Alaska as well.

In Arkansas, the official state flag must be manufactured in the United States. Some might think that this is a smaller example, but does the government plan on taking a proportional and measured response here as well?

Speaker, my tongue is in my cheek when I say this: I bet that the minister's BlackBerry is already blowing up due to all of the regulations he's going to be writing.

Here's another: Since the Second World War, California has held a 5% preference on California-manufactured goods in public work contracts and has mandated the use of US-produced manufactured material in public contracts. California also gives preference to US-grown and -processed foods in public entity purchasing.

This government is sending hundreds of millions of dollars to California under their cap-and-trade scheme. Again, this particular Liberal government is choosing to send hundreds of millions of Ontario dollars to California under the cap-and-trade scheme, yet here we have several protectionist measures on the books. I question: Will the Premier and her government take action against these laws as well?

Let's go on to Colorado. Colorado gives preference to Colorado-grown, -raised and -processed agricultural goods. Florida mandates that all state and American flags purchased by the state must use American-made materials and be American-made.

I'm only partway through my list here, but I would just like to emphasize that the Premier said that she would "respond to any Buy American laws that cause unfair harm to Ontario workers and businesses."

I might suggest, from my small list that I just shared moments ago, that this government really has their work cut out for them if they're going to walk their talk in this particular bill.

Moving on, we're going to go on to Georgia here. Georgia mandates the inclusion of a clause in state contracts that stipulates that contractors must use Georgia forest products in construction, repair and renovation projects. Georgia also reinforces a general preference on supplies, materials, equipment and agricultural products that are manufactured or produced in Georgia. Speaker, isn't that peachy? How is the government going to attack that one?

Hawaii applies for a preference for Hawaiian-grown, -manufactured or -processed products which varies from 10% to 15%, depending on the class of product. This one is relatively recent, having been on the books since 1994.

Illinois has several protectionist state statutes on the books. For example, in 1998, they implemented a general preference for Illinois agricultural products and plastic products made from Illinois corn by-products. Illinois also has a provision in every public works contract that mandates the use of steel products that are manufactured or produced in the United States. Does this one sound familiar?

Again, I ask whether this government plans on actually taking action against all states that have protectionist measures on the books.

Still keeping with Illinois, they mandate preferential purchase on materials and supplies that have been manufactured in the United States.

Indiana has similar rules that mandate that governmental bodies adopt rules to promote the purchase of US-manufactured supplies. Indiana also has rules that mandate that domestic steel products be used in state products. Indiana applies a 10% preference as well to agricultural products grown, produced or processed in Indiana.

Kentucky mandates that state agencies must purchase Kentucky-grown products.

Louisiana applies a 10% preference for steel rolled in Louisiana. Louisiana also applies a 10% preference to all agricultural, forestry, meat, eggs and seafood products that have been manufactured, processed or assembled in Louisiana.

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Maryland applies a 10% preference for locally grown food in all state school and facility contracts. Maryland also mandates that all public bodies require contractors to use or supply American-manufactured goods in public works. Lastly, it mandates that all public bodies use or supply American steel products in public works when purchasing large machinery.

Here's a good one, Speaker. I have a gentleman in my office who loves the Blue Jays, and he's very excited that

spring training just started last weekend. We all know that that means baseball season is right around the corner.

Guess what, Speaker? Minnesota requires American-made steel in the construction of ballparks. Exactly how is the Premier going to make Minnesota play ball with her? We have to be real here.

Missouri requires purchasing preference to all commodities manufactured, mined, processed, produced or grown in Missouri. Missouri also applies a 10% preference when public agencies purchase or lease domestically manufactured goods and commodities for contracts greater than \$25,000.

New Hampshire mandates that state and American flags purchased by the state must be manufactured in the United States.

New Mexico applies a preference to materials produced, grown, processed or manufactured in New Mexico for all public works contracts. New Mexico also mandates that the timber used in the construction and repair of public buildings must be grown in New Mexico.

In a moment, I'm going to talk about New York.

So, Speaker, why are we all here today? It's because of what's happening in New York. New York has mandated domestically produced steel in certain construction contracts. But as we have seen, this is not the first protectionist legislation to deal with iron and steel. It's just the first to draw a political response from a desperate Premier right here in Ontario.

Moving on, let's talk about North Carolina. North Carolina gives preference to products manufactured or produced in North Carolina for state contracts, and gives preference to products and services manufactured or produced in the United States in the case that North Carolina products cannot be sourced.

Ohio applies a preference to products mined or produced in America. Ohio also restricts meat or poultry contracts to bidders who are under either federal or Ohio jurisdiction.

Oklahoma applies preferences to materials mined, quarried, manufactured or procured in Oklahoma for the construction of public buildings. Oklahoma also applies a 2.5% preference for US-manufactured or -produced goods and equipment for state contracts.

Oregon has a general preference for goods and services that are manufactured or produced in Oregon, and that state also applies a 10% preference to goods that are fabricated and processed in Oregon for all public contracts.

Pennsylvania mandates that public agency procurement contracts include a provision stipulating that only domestic steel products can be used.

Rhode Island also applies a similar stipulation on domestic steel. They also direct purchasing agents to buy Rhode Island foodstuffs for state institutions.

South Dakota prohibits the purchase of foreign meat food products by any purchasing agency.

Tennessee mandates a preference for in-state meat producers when state departments and agencies award food contracts. Tennessee also applies a general

preference for goods and products grown in Tennessee in all state department or agency procurement.

Don't worry, Speaker. I'm almost done going through the states.

Let's talk about the Longhorn State now: Texas. They give preference to goods produced or grown in Texas for all state agency purchases. They also mandate domestic iron and steel in water supply projects, and require that, for certain projects, only US-made iron and steel products can be used.

Utah offers reciprocal preference to bidders offering products that are produced, manufactured, mined or grown in Utah.

West Virginia mandates the use of domestic steel in any state construction project, as well as domestically produced aluminum, glass and steel in public works contracts over \$50,000.

Wisconsin applies a general preference for materials mined, produced, fabricated, assembled or manufactured in the United States.

And for today, for the purposes of this debate—lastly, Wyoming applies a 5% preference for Wyoming-grown, -manufactured and -produced materials in all public purchases.

If the government didn't have the time or the interest to consult with the opposition parties and stakeholders, or to write a bill that's more than five pages, how on earth will they have time to deal with all of these regulations that will address the issue at hand, and what they claim to be doing through Bill 194? Quite frankly, it's just, again, politics over good policy.

Speaker, let's recap right now. I just listed off 50-plus Buy American laws on the books at the state level in the United States, eight of which are very similar to the Buy American provision that we are currently fighting against and one of which brings us to this debate today. So I will again call into question the exact intentions of this government, suddenly bringing in a new protectionist procurement law three months before an election.

Nineteen of these measures were enacted during the government's time in office. Have they only just realized recently that American states have protectionist policies on the books? No, Speaker; we must give the Wynne Liberals a little more credit than that. The reason for this legislation is plain and simple: This is a reckless election ploy aimed at finding an alternative villain. This legislation aims to connect the competitive disadvantage of Ontario firms with outside forces rather than the Wynne Liberals accepting responsibility for their own disastrous economic policies. Again, only now, Speaker, are we seeing a bill, just a couple of months before an election. I can't help but think that this timeline is truly the reason behind the bill and nothing more.

Now that we have gotten through all of the American examples—examples that the government of the day, namely the Liberals, chose not to respond to—let's talk about this government's own habit of bringing in their own protectionist rules and actually making Americans retaliate against us.

The Ontario government broadened measures that didn't quite pass the WTO sniff test when it came to fair business practices. There were significant trade issues with the Liberals' Green Energy Act. Does everybody remember what has gone on over the last couple of years? This disastrous policy came into effect in 2009, and it's the main driver behind the doubling of Ontario's hydro bills over the past decade.

Although it is infamous for that main fact, there was another key fact that this government overlooked, but again, it was knee-jerk policy that has always caused this government to overlook the realities of how their bad policies affect Ontarians. Talking about the Green Energy Act, this law had a 60% made-in-Ontario content requirement for the wind and solar projects that we were about to overpay for. This protectionist requirement led Japan and several third parties, which included the United States and the European Union, to file a complaint with the WTO.

A Toronto Star article from 2012 warned that the WTO was likely to rule against Ontario, and guess what? The Wynne Liberal government ignored the warnings. The headline in the article read, "Siemens Canada Says It's Not Abandoning Ontario Even If a Trade Ruling on Green Energy Rules Goes Against the Province."

In 2013, the WTO ruled that the domestic-content provisions were discriminatory against foreign firms, and guess what? They were removed.

Sure enough, last summer Siemens—surprise, surprise—closed its Tillsonburg plant, which cost the town 340 jobs. So this Liberal government hasn't been perfect on the trade file either. In fact, this government has been guilty of writing laws that ultimately were ruled to have contravened WTO rules. Even worse: Because this Wynne Liberal government failed to recognize that their own policy was in fact protectionist, they failed to act. As a consequence, 340 people lost their jobs in Tillsonburg.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I guess I need to remind the members that the member for Huron—Bruce has the floor and I need to be able to hear her make her presentation.

The member for Huron—Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you, Speaker.

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I think when we talk about the realities of the protectionism applied in the Green Energy Act, we've hit a few nerves here today, so let's continue talking about it. Speaker, the results of the Green Energy Act were not just the fact that the Liberals more than doubled our electricity prices and hampered Ontario's competitiveness; there was also the legacy of a bad trade policy. With this legislation, the Wynne Liberals argue that they are standing up for Ontario's manufacturers. But this doesn't match the facts.

We have heard time after time in this House about the loss of over 300,000 manufacturing jobs in the province. We have seen factory after factory close and leave our ridings for other jurisdictions. We have seen policy after

policy cripple the viability and the competitiveness of Ontario businesses. We have seen report after report from the Auditor General chronicling the misuse of taxpayer funds and the disregard for Ontario's economy. So Ontarians must ask, why Bill 194 now? Why now have the Wynne Liberals suddenly taken an interest in Ontario manufacturing? Again, this is a constant theme. It's politics, not good public policy.

The Liberals will claim that manufacturing is suffering worldwide, but this is simply not the case. According to Stats Canada, many provinces have seen a growth in manufacturing jobs since the recession. In fact, with the exception of Quebec, Ontario has the poorest manufacturing job numbers since the recession.

According to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, there has been tremendous growth in manufacturing south of the border. States like Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Ohio, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming have all seen job growth in their manufacturing sectors. But what about the Great Lakes region? The manufacturing engine was hit hard by the recession.

It has been noted many times in this House that over 300,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in this province. However, this is almost the same amount of manufacturing jobs that have been gained in Great Lakes states since the recession. Can we find the common thread here, Speaker? A huge number of manufacturing jobs have been created in Minnesota, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin.

For goodness' sake, just last week I received an email that was forwarded to me by a Huron–Bruce manufacturer from Vermont. Vermont was telling this manufacturer why he should come down to their state and see why doing business in their state would be so much better than in Ontario. Again, Premier Wynne has done a good job in being the best economic development officer the States have ever seen.

Where was this government's concern when new jobs were being created around Canada and across the United States but not in Ontario? Where was their concern when their high electricity prices were compromising Ontario jobs? Where were this Wynne Liberal government's concerns when factories were closing in Ontario? Let's dive a little deeper and examine this whole situation.

This legislation would supposedly address steel protectionism from New York. As you know, manufacturing is an energy-intensive industry. Behind paper, steel is the second most intensive sector for electricity. Now, is it any wonder that the two sectors with the largest loss in real GDP were paper and steel? As the Liberal electricity prices skyrocketed, jobs and growth in the steel and paper industries plummeted. Between 2005 and 2015, Ontario lost almost one third of its total jobs in paper manufacturing. During that same time period, imports in paper manufacturing increased by 169%. What's wrong with that picture?

Again, between 2005 and 2015, this Liberal government let the real GDP of that sector shrink by a quarter and allowed the employment in the sector to shrink also by a quarter. Now, I'm curious: Did the Liberals table legislation at that time to save jobs in the steel sector? Did they? Does anyone recall?

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: No. That's right; the answer is no. Again I ask: Did the Liberals invest in this sector? No. Did the Liberals actually lower their hydro prices? No, not where it needed to hit. And that after 15 years of mismanagement, the Liberals have decided to notice the steel industry—well, Speaker, that is what's really rich. This reeks of electioneering at its worst.

Now let's talk about the bill itself, because even if the government's intentions are cynical, perhaps there is merit to the bill.

To start, as I have established, Ontarians are likely wondering which states will be targeted and what form this retaliation will take. Usually we might find this defined in the legislation, but again, this legislation is only five pages in depth. There's a problem. This bill is small; it's about the length of my Sunday crossword. Why so small? Because this is enabling legislation that leaves so much up to regulation.

You know what that means: A lot of decisions will be made behind closed doors, and because of that, Ontarians should be very anxious. That means no transparency and no consultation. And who enacts all these regulations? The President of the Treasury Board and the Premier, along with their cabinet.

What could go wrong behind closed doors? Well, once again, do we dare even start going down that list? We'll just say that the Green Energy Act really encapsulates all that can go wrong in that regard.

In question period this morning, the President of the Treasury Board claimed that this bill addresses an "absence of a coherent, cohesive response to what is happening south of the border." The only legislation lacking coherence and cohesion is the Liberals' own policy. Rather than consult with the rest of the Legislature and with Ontarians, this legislation empowers the Liberal backrooms to proceed as they see fit. What could go wrong?

This is brazen—this from the people who brought us high electricity prices; this from the people who brought us eHealth, Ornge and the gas plants scandal; this from the people who have stood idly by while 300,000 manufacturing jobs disappeared. Again I ask: What could go wrong?

The lack of consultation has been an absolute trademark of the Wynne Liberal government, and the lack of transparency is so concerning. The focus on backroom decision-making is also concerning. Let me be very clear: The backroom decision-making has been a choice the Wynne Liberal government has made. They are choosing to take debate away from us in the House by working through regulations behind closed doors and taking transparency and openness completely away from Ontarians.

Let's take a look at the text of the bill. It actually says in Bill 194 that consultation is an option, not a duty. Again, I repeat this: Bill 194 says consultation is an option, not a duty. Who in their right mind, and in the spirit of transparency, would ever support that?

In fact, the bill reads: "Before a regulation is made under this act, the minister may consult, in the manner that the minister considers appropriate, with any persons ... the minister considers appropriate given the content of the proposed regulation." You just can't make this stuff up.

Ontarians from the north to the south and from the east to the west should be concerned that yet again the Wynne Liberal government has introduced a piece of legislation that is absolutely kicking them in the knees and taking our voices away as opposition. They are choosing to do things behind closed doors.

Disaster will continue under this government. This government just can't be trusted to consult. The minister and cabinet not only have unlimited authority to make a decision, but, as I said, they're locking out all voices that could have a relevant aspect to share with regard to how to move forward.

Now, I have to wonder: If the shoe was on the other foot, how would these Liberals react to this legislation? If another party was in power, be it an NDP government, a PC government or a Green Party government, would the Liberals truly want any of the other parties to have this kind of authority?

Would you, I ask? Speaker, nobody is answering, but I would suggest they surely would not.

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Yet again, instead of doing the hard work and tabling viable legislation, this government has chosen platitudes instead of policy. Instead of focusing on the economy, they are focusing on the election. I'm having déjà vu, Speaker.

This government is clearly disinterested in the duties of a responsible government. Consulting with stakeholders? Not interested. Consulting with the opposition? Not interested. And so, Speaker, this government has so readily abandoned consultation that it has neglected Ontario jobs, neglected the manufacturing industry and ignored the steel sector.

Now they're asking us to trust them to make regulations in the backroom. They are hoping that we will sit idly by while they further damage the Ontario economy and our relationship with trading partners.

But the stakes are just too high. Ontario has by far the highest exposure and reliance on cross-border trade of any Canadian province. Now is definitely not the time to gamble.

The economy of this province is reliant on a free flow of goods between Ontario and the US states. This is a reality that is well known and understood throughout the province. Farmers in my riding of Huron-Bruce, food processors, small businesses, chambers of commerce, the automotive industry, the manufacturers all understand this, so why can't this government get it?

This is particularly concerning for those regions, such as southwestern Ontario and the areas around Windsor, London and Sarnia, that rely so heavily on exports for economic prosperity.

In moments, and later in this debate, we're going to hear from the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, whose riding encompasses Cornwall. There is a lot of movement across those bridges in Cornwall. I truly look forward to his contribution to this debate, because he too will have some very real concerns, and examples of why Bill 194 is not getting it right for Ontarians.

The very same regions that I was talking about have not been seeing a lot of job growth right now. In this time of economic turmoil and protectionism abroad, I'm baffled, quite frankly, that this Premier and her government would perpetuate, rather than dispel, the myths of protectionism.

What Ontario requires in times like this is leadership.

Dan Ujcz, a trade lawyer who has worked with both federal and provincial governments, has noted, "It would be a much better use of Premier Wynne's time to be setting up those reciprocal relationships with states and provinces as opposed to finger-wagging for electoral politics."

"Finger-wagging"—experts are actually asking this Premier of Ontario, Premier Wynne, to stop finger-wagging. Isn't that interesting?

What we know is that, historically, Wynne Liberal policies, this new piece of legislation included, have created uncertainty in our economy. Uncertainty is the worst thing for Ontario, the worst thing for Ontario communities and the worst thing for jobs. We have uncertainty about future employment, about the viability of businesses and about the price of electricity. And now, thanks to this last-ditch election ploy, we have uncertainty about contracts and the future flow of cross-border trade.

When the Premier says that she is "not in the business of harming Ontario businesses," honestly, Speaker, we have to ask her, what does she really mean by saying this? Does she think the opposition and the people of Ontario have been asleep for the past month, let alone for the last 15 years? By stoking the embers of protectionism, the Premier risks a potential trade war. If we're not careful, she could send the remaining manufacturing jobs up in smoke.

Yet again, this government has signalled to Ontarians, time and again, that winning an election is more important to them than standing up for Ontarians.

Over 100 years ago, on February 21, 1911, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce began. It was then, as it is today, a collection of businesses interested in helping Ontario's economy to prosper. Their opening mandate was to remove barriers to trade. Again back in 1911, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, when it began, had an opening mandate to remove barriers of trade and to foster the free flow of goods while, as the Globe noted, "to leave politics behind." If only our government could take a page out of the chamber's history book.

The provincial economy and the livelihood of Ontarians is something that should not be used as an election pawn. It is disgraceful that this government is attempting to use this legislation as a way to get re-elected. They are looking to lay the blame for our economy on the USA. Again, this desperate, out-of-tricks government is looking to lay to blame for the current state of our economy on the USA, but we already know who is to blame for the current status of Ontario's economy.

Now, on the question of this bill, we must ask ourselves as legislators whether this bill is worthy of our support, and a bill that restricts the free flow of goods clearly is not worthy of our support. A bill that does not define limits or sets thresholds is short-sighted and, again, not worthy of our support. Finally, a bill that risks harming our relationship with our neighbours is most definitely not a bill worth pursuing.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I will make a few comments to her speech, which was really well prepared and very well delivered. Certainly some of the focus is to be champions for business. When you have the cost of hydro as high as we have it in the north, it's pretty hard to put that in the same sentence.

Mais j'aimerais regarder au côté francophone du projet de loi 194, qui s'appelle Loi concernant l'équité en matière de marchés publics. C'est assez intéressant qu'en Ontario—en anglais, c'est « fairness in procurement »—quand on parle de « procurement », on dit « approvisionnement ». On ne dit certainement pas « marché public ». Du côté francophone, on a vraiment l'air de dire que c'est une loi en matière d'équité.

We're talking about trade. It's rather interesting that the French part of the bill doesn't talk about procurement. It talks about trade and market trade. I don't know what happened to the discourse here. A few things were changed at the last minute in this voluminously paged bill that they did not have time to have—sorry, Speaker, two-page bill. They were so hard at work on those two pages, dotting their i's and crossing their t's, they did not notice that the French title is not the same as the English title. When we talk about procurement in English—en français, en Ontario, on dit « approvisionnement »—it was rather interesting. That was a little aside from the presentation that she has made.

If you want to be champions for business in northern Ontario, get us a road so we can send our goods to market, plow this road so that in the winter we can send our goods to market and maybe bring other forms of energy that would be friendly to market.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Scarborough Centre.

Mr. Brad Duguid: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's the first time in a long time I've been recognized under that former title, but I'm pleased—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Current title.

Mr. Brad Duguid: My current title. I spent four years prior with that title being recognized every time I stood up, so it's good to hear that again.

I just want to respond to both opposition parties on this. I've got to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I am flabbergasted that we would have opposition parties in this province not willing to stand up for Ontario businesses, with a total disregard for the need for some form of leverage when you go into discussion with the States. They don't want us to be able to speak out for Ontario businesses when they're getting whacked by protectionist measures being taken in the US.

Look, there is not a political leader in the country today who's doing more to increase trade, more to fight the protectionist forces in the US than our Premier. She has met now with 38 governors in the last year and a half alone—38 governors. I was with her in Washington just this past weekend. She is recognized by governor after governor as being a Canadian champion for opening up that border.

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But those governors also recognized that when they bring in protectionist measures, they're not going to reduce them—like they did in New York when we lobbied them to do that—just because they like us. We need leverage when we go into those discussions so that we can say, “If you are going to whack our Ontario workers”—whom the NDP should be standing up for—“or if you're going to whack our Ontario businesses”—which the PCs should be standing up for—“well, we're going to reciprocate in kind,” so they have something in the game as well.

That just makes sense, Mr. Speaker. The opposition parties on this simply do not.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: In spite of this proposed legislation, Bill 194, the case remains for open, reciprocal trade across North America.

This New York state legislation against steel we produce in Ontario is ill-advised. Proposed retaliation flies in the face of the fact that the United States and Canada boast one of the largest trading relationships in the world. No other country buys more goods and services that are made in the USA than Canada—something to the effect of \$322 billion a year. As a result, Canada supports close to nine million US jobs. Factories and farming in both countries are linked, obviously—just-in-time delivery chains that crisscross the border. Investment, productivity and competitiveness in both countries are by and large supported by common rules and harmonized regulation—not suffocation and not retaliation.

These are some of the things I've been hearing in the past year. I've attended four conferences south of the border, primarily because of the threat to NAFTA since the change in the US administration. I can tell you, at the state and at the provincial level, elected representatives agree—and the numbers speak for themselves—that trade has resulted in prosperity and good-paying jobs. Restricting Canada-US trade and retaliating in kind suffocates that very prosperity and kills those good-paying jobs.

I will acknowledge that Canada and the US together have lost hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs to countries like Mexico and China, largely due to less stringent regulation and cheaper labour. Let's address the problem where it lies.

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

Miss Monique Taylor: I listened intently to the member from Huron–Bruce and her depiction of Bill 194, the Fairness in Procurement Act. She brings a lot of interesting points at the beginning of her debate: about not being able to get the bill in a timely manner, not having proper consultation, not being able to get the briefing that is so necessary when we bring bills like this forward, and about the government dropping things on the opposition's lap at the last minute and then wanting to ring the bells, saying that everybody else is holding things up when, quite frankly, the government couldn't care less what anybody on this side of the House has to say. We've seen this with bills time and time again. This is another prime example.

It was also really interesting to hear the member talk about the 50-plus states that already have Buy American contracts and procurement policies. Why is it now that the Premier has decided to do this, right before an election? Well, typically because it's for the Liberals' best interests and not, typically, the people of Ontario's best interests. She always seems to look out for her best interests first. She failed to protect Ontarians' interests when it came to the new CPTPP deal, so how can we trust her to make sure that she is looking out for Ontarians' best interests this time?

Once again, is this about Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals or is it about the people of Ontario?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments, I believe. We return to the member for Huron–Bruce to reply.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I do appreciate the comments that we just heard today with regard to Bill 194 from the members from Nickelback—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Nickel Belt.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Nickelback—that's a good band, right?

Mr. John Vanthof: She's more popular.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: She's more popular? You know what? That's cool. Anyway, yes, we have a popular band called Nickelback. But I would also like to thank the member from Nickel Belt for her comments, as well as the members from Scarborough Centre, Haldimand–Norfolk and Hamilton Mountain, because I think it all points to the fact that we, as a government, as a Legislature, need to hold each other to account because Ontarians need us to do better.

As the member from Nickel Belt said, this voluminous—I love that word; it really speaks loudly in what's not there. I sincerely apologize to all our francophone Ontarians in terms of the misstep that was made in the translation because it points, time and again, to how quick legislation coming out of this government gets things wrong. I look forward to the amendments coming

from the member from Nickel Belt to correct this. I know we've tried different amendments for different bills in committee before, but I look forward to seeing you bring this forward.

I just want to say in closing, let's again reflect on historically what the first mandate of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce was. Their opening mandate was to remove barriers to trade and foster the free flow of goods while, as the Globe noted, to "leave politics behind." But we don't need legislation like the Wynne Liberal government has brought forward in Bill 194. We specifically do not need legislation, like Bill 194, that is clearly simple politics as opposed to good policy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before I ask for further debate, I wish to inform the House that the following document has been tabled in the Legislature: the report from the Office of the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario concerning the review of expense claims under the Cabinet Ministers' and Opposition Leaders' Expenses Review and Accountability Act, 2002, for submissions received in October, November and December 2017 and complete as of February 23, 2018.

Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House and, today, to represent the New Democratic Party in our lead-off response to Bill 194, An Act respecting fairness in procurement. We will leave the debate on what it means en français pour un autre jour. Or if I get—

M^{me} France Gélinas: Inspired.

Mr. John Vanthof:—inspired close to the end of the hour, perhaps I will read the bill in French. We'll see if the whole thing matches or not.

I would like to say, at the outset, that in principle New Democrats support trade relationships that are reciprocal and that benefit all parties. I think that's pretty clear. We must support all efforts to preserve access to American procurement contracts for Ontario businesses. Having said that, you can't look at a bill like this in isolation.

I've listened to the debate intently today and I've heard several times from the government side that this bill isn't about trade. This bill is all about procurement. I've heard that several times. I've heard it in the speeches and I've heard it heckled several times: that this bill has nothing to do with trade but it's all about procurement.

Some states—in particular, New York—have passed Buy American legislation. This bill gives the government the tools to retaliate. That's what this bill is supposed to do. It's all about procurement.

But you can't look at a bill like this in isolation, and that is the biggest problem because right now, we are at a critical stage in a few things. We're at a critical stage in negotiations with our trading partners, specifically the United States of America and Mexico, with the NAFTA trade negotiations. This action could conceivably cause some collateral damage. I'm going to talk in a few minutes about a few examples of collateral damage.

1510

For those who don't know, or who haven't thought about this yet, there is an election happening in Ontario

in a few months. I heard in the response from the member from Scarborough—

Mr. Brad Duguid: Centre.

Mr. John Vanthof: —Scarborough Centre—thank you, member from Scarborough Centre—that you need bills like this to provide leverage.

I agree, to a point. But how much leverage does a government with three months left in its mandate truly have? That's the question. You need leverage for your last three months? The question is, leverage for what? To leverage the American states? Or to leverage the voters of Ontario? And that is—

Mr. James J. Bradley: So cynical.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a very critical question. The member from—

Mr. James J. Bradley: St. Catharines.

Mr. John Vanthof: —St. Catharines, the dean of the Legislature—also a very effective heckler—accuses the rest of us of being cynical. I think that asking what this bill is trying to leverage in the dying days of a 15-year-old government—I don't think that's a cynical question at all. I think that's a very realistic question. It's a very realistic question, because it's the collateral damage that we're most worried about.

Does the NDP want to fight for steelworkers and fight for steel jobs in Ontario? Yes. That's our lifeblood. We will do anything we can to make sure that our proud people of steel—can we say “men of steel” anymore?—and their associated workers maintain their jobs. I think a lot of them are more worried about dumping from other jurisdictions than they are about this procurement bill right now.

But having said that, this bill has the capacity to cause some serious collateral damage. In this heightened trade atmosphere, there is no such thing as a piece of legislation that is retaliatory in nature that is only about procurement.

Speaker, I will give you a couple of examples of collateral damage. One of them relates directly to this provincial government, and one not so much, but they're both examples of collateral damage.

If you will recall—I can't remember the exact date—the President of the United States, President Trump, at one point said that the dairy farmers in this country were being very unfair to the United States. At that point, what had happened was that several dairy farmers—I believe, in Wisconsin; I can't remember the exact state—had lost their contract to a dairy exporting into Canada. As a result, the President aimed directly at Canada's supply management system, which we all support.

The supply management system in Canada is local food, before local food was cool. We protect dairy farmers, we protect farmers to make sure that we are assured of fresh food grown under our rules and regulations.

The President blamed the loss of that contract on supply management, and that was not the case. That was not the case.

What happens in the United States: They don't pool their milk, like we do in Canada. For those who don't

know what milk pooling is, in Canada—and it happens all the time when a processor will gain or lose a contract. If your local processor loses a contract, then because the milk is pooled, you don't lose your market. Every dairy farmer in the country loses a decimal of the market. As a result, the market is buffered and individual farmers are buffered. They don't do that in the United States. There's a lot of things they don't do in the milk market because they don't have supply management.

When they lost that contract, I believe 70 or 80 dairy farmers lost their ability to sell their milk. Milk is a perishable product. You can't just tell the cows not to give milk; the milk is going to come. As a result, those farmers were thrown into turmoil. That issue was used to convince the President of the United States that our system was the cause of that. Our system, the supply management system, was not the cause of those farmers losing that contract, but no one in the press figured that out. The people who were opposed to supply management didn't bother clarifying, and it was used as a tool to directly impact our system.

I know, talking to farmers in my area—and farmers across the province, but certainly farmers in my area—it made them very, very nervous, because they are always having to defend supply management. The reason they've always had to defend supply management is that it's a good system. If it was a bad system, nobody would be trying to break into it. It's a good system. But that's a case of how something that was misrepresented caused—it could have caused, and it might still be causing—collateral damage, because we are still in NAFTA negotiations. These negotiations are much different than anything we have seen before. They're much less predictable; the American administration is much less predictable. We think it's a negotiating tactic. It's a negotiating tactic that President Trump, before he was President, used very effectively to grow his business, and he's doing the same thing with his administration to gain an advantage for his country.

Nevertheless, it's a very tense time to be putting forward anything this broad, this wide-ranging and this close to the end of the government's own mandate. It's incredibly suspect and incredibly dangerous. That's one example.

The second example about collateral damage and how this government—I'll give you an example of how this government has passed legislation in the past where they never took trade or international agreements into account.

Some of you may know that the reason that people lobbied me to run is because of a prospective landfill in what is now my riding, the Adams mine landfill, which at the time was to be the biggest landfill in North America. As president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, I, along with many other people, spent 15 years fighting it. As a result, in this Legislature, a bill was passed, the Adams mine landfill act. No, it wasn't the Adams mine landfill act; it was the Adams Mine Lake Act. That's what it was called. Under the Adams Mine Lake Act, that site will never be used as a landfill, which everyone in

northern Ontario was happy about. I actually was opposed to it and spoke against it at the committee hearing for the following reason: The Adams mine is a fully licensed landfill. The licence was never taken away. The licence was granted under, first, the Conservative government under Mr. Harris and was upheld by the McGuinty Liberals. And then, through public pressure, they passed legislation. Because the licence was never revoked, the taxpayers of Ontario paid all the investors all their costs—which I agree with. It was a licensed site, and the government said, “Even though it’s licensed, you can’t use it.” The taxpayers coughed up the money to pay all the investors.

1520

There’s only one investor who refused the money. He was an American gentleman, and he refused the money because he had a licence—he kept his share; actually, he bought the whole site. He took the Canadian government to the WTO, because he had a licensed landfill and the Ontario government was withdrawing and not allowing him to use his licensed landfill to the benefit of his company. He took the Canadian government to the WTO. A lot of people don’t know this. The hearing was held in Vancouver. Before the hearing, the Canadian government spent a lot of money defending the Ontario government’s decision. They actually sent a whole team of hydrogeologists and lawyers to Timiskaming to interview us. The lead hydrogeologist, in an interview with the federation of agriculture, of which I was still president, asked me what the closest farm was to the site. I said, “Well”—I forget how many kilometres, eight kilometres. I said, “But why, if it’s not going to leak? According to the Ontario government, it’s a fully approved landfill and it’s not going to leak.” The hydrogeologist from the government of Canada said, “At this point, we all know it’s going to leak like a sieve.” Yet, it was fully approved by the Ontario government.

If the Ontario government had done what they should have done and withdrawn the approval, it never would have gone to the WTO. But the Ontario government took the political way out, and that’s why I’m questioning this again. They made the political decision to create the Adams Mine Lake Act as opposed to—and that’s why I spoke against this act—taking the actual time to find out how a site got approved that was not going to work. How did that happen? They didn’t do that. They took the political decision. As a result, they forced the Canadian government to spend, I believe, millions of dollars to defend in a WTO action.

So Speaker, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the government takes political action to benefit, and to avoid doing the right thing. It’s not beyond the realm of possibility for this government. It certainly wasn’t with the Adams Mine Lake Act.

Again, the member from the opposition mentioned the Green Energy Act. We supported the Green Energy Act. I’m going to come clean on that—it was before I was here—we supported the Green Energy Act. The problem with the Green Energy Act is that the government

decided—again, they didn’t look at the collateral damage that could have been possible—to promote green energy so that the green energy plants would be built here and turbine plants would be built here. So they prescribed that the ingredients of the turbines or the solar panels had to have a certain percentage of Canadian or Ontario parts—

Miss Monique Taylor: Materials.

Mr. John Vanthof: Materials. That sounded good, so what they did is they made the price that you could get for green energy high, to support the construction of those factories. They never really thought it through, that that price could eventually be translated into higher prices for the people.

I remember that distinctly, because I was with the federation of agriculture the first time the Green Energy Act was explained to us. The person on stage was explaining that if we put solar panels on our farms we, at that time, could get 80 cents a kilowatt. We looked at each other and said, “But how is that possible? We’re paying eight cents a kilowatt.”

A lot of my friends—and I don’t blame them a bit—went and got those contracts, because the government issued them. If you recall, when other countries, other jurisdictions, challenged the government, and now you don’t have to have 60% Ontario material in the projects, that was spun as the government negotiating a better price for the energy. Again, Speaker, that was politically motivated, as opposed to people-motivated. That’s what we have to look at here.

When you take legislation that has been proposed—it’s the Fairness in Procurement Act, which is basically retaliatory against states with Buy American. There are many states that have had Buy American provisions for quite a while. It’s concerning that in the dying days of this government, they choose now to do this. It’s very concerning, the collateral damage that could come from this.

When the TPP was being discussed, and when New Democrats brought up the problems that this trade agreement could have with supply management, with the auto sector, where was the Premier then? Yes, the Premier has now issued—I believe I read the press release—a demand that the federal government give compensation to the auto sector and supply management, but we didn’t see anything in this Legislature regarding that issue as it was going on.

I’d like to really repeat that we are not opposed in principle to making sure that our industries are treated fairly. That’s not the issue here. The issue is whether or not we can truly believe that the government is going to use this legislation as intended. That’s the issue, because if you actually look at the legislation, in the legislation there’s no requirement that it be proportional or reciprocal. There’s no requirement for that in the legislation. So, when one of the members on the government side said, “Well, if the New York government demands that you cannot use steel from a mill in Hamilton or Sault Ste. Marie, then this legislation requires that the Ontario

government will reciprocate and you will not be able to use steel from a New York steel mill,” that’s not what the legislation says. The legislation says that the government can take retaliatory measures, but it doesn’t require that they be proportional or reciprocal.

1530

Again, you have to wonder how well thought out this legislation is and how much time the government is actually—I’m running out of things to say.

I’m going to repeat: How long has the government thought about the collateral damage that this legislation could cause? There is nothing really in this legislation—what’s the term? It’s enabling legislation. It gives the government power, but it doesn’t restrict the government at all.

The government is passing, or trying to pass, legislation with three months left in its mandate. Is it three months? March, April, May—yes, three months left in its mandate.

The government is passing legislation that could be damaging for future relations, and yet there is no restriction on what could be done.

This legislation could be very dangerous. It might not be; it might be very bland.

Mr. Brad Duguid: Every state in the United States has the same power.

Mr. John Vanthof: The former minister—whom I actually enjoy debating with—the member from Scarborough Centre just heckled that every state has the same power. So why did it take this government 15 years to come—why do this in your last three months?

Ms. Deborah Matthews: You said we were going too fast.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, no. I’m not saying that they’re going too fast. If every state in the United States already has this power, then why did this government wait till the last three months of their mandate to bring this forward?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member from Timiskaming–Cochrane has the floor.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker. Actually, I don’t mind if they heckle. I quite enjoy debating with the member from Scarborough Centre.

When the President of the Treasury Board was doing her lead, she mentioned several stakeholder groups who were generally supportive of this bill. We’ve also talked to stakeholder groups. The issue with most of the stakeholder groups we’ve spoken to is—because of the atmosphere right now—the question of whether this bill at this point is going to help or going to hurt.

I’ll do a quote here from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. I’m going to read the whole quote, because it’s both good and bad. “Positive diplomatic relations should always be our priority when it comes to trade discussions. With the Fairness in Procurement Act, we understand that the government’s intention is to respond to barriers rather than escalate them.” We would hope that that’s the case. That would be our focus. “However,

we are concerned with any approach that risks escalation of trade barriers, especially when it is taken only by Ontario. No other province in Canada has legislation in place that would escalate trade sanctions when they occur.

“The Ontario Chamber of Commerce believes that the best approach for Ontario is the formation of positive bilateral co-operation with our American neighbours. This is the approach the Premier and her government have taken to date, and they must continue to do so.”

I would agree with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The member from Scarborough Centre, in his two-minute response, chastised the opposition. I think he grouped us in one group. We are not philosophically opposed to this. We are incredibly worried about what the government’s actual intention is with this bill. I think the biggest issue—and the leverage is a good question—is whether the government is trying to leverage our American counterparts, or leverage the Ontario voter. At three months to an election; you’ve just got to wonder.

I heard several times that the reason for this bill, as stated by the President of Treasury Board, is to protect Ontario business. I hope it’s the government’s goal—it certainly would be ours—to protect all Ontario business. I would certainly say that not all Ontario business feels protected.

I can tell you that the forestry sector is also very concerned about the NAFTA negotiations, and quite concerned about any actions that a provincial government—and, quite frankly, an American state—takes while we are in multinational negotiations.

While we are in the most difficult negotiations I think we’ve ever been in, mainly because of our trading partner and mainly because of the tactics of our trading partner, no one really knows what state we’re in.

I wish I could get the list of states from my colleague over there, and I’d have a lot easier time talking. She did a great job on research—better than mine.

There are so many things that we could be doing that would probably benefit our businesses as much on these issues. In fact, if you take some of our own government contracts—and the Auditor General has brought this up—many high fees to bid are putting barriers to our own businesses for government contracts. If we change the vendor-of-record list for procuring external IT consultants, we would benefit our own people.

You know what? I just might have to resort to reading the bill in French.

Ms. Deborah Matthews: That would be good for the ratings.

Mr. John Vanthof: The member from Scarborough Centre stopped heckling me, so I stopped getting—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: He stopped filling the time for you.

Mr. John Vanthof: I think, Speaker, why I’m having trouble with—

Mrs. Liz Sandals: Electricity?

Mr. John Vanthof: It would be easy to criticize the government on the things they’ve done in the 15 years,

and there are all kinds of things that we could criticize the government on.

Mr. Brad Duguid: I'm here to help.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay. Now he has warned me up.

Getting back to the Green Energy Act, or getting back to electricity in this province—electricity is a huge issue for industry in this province. It's a huge issue for homeowners—a huge issue for everyone in this province.

1540

Interjections.

Mr. John Vanthof: That's very disconcerting.

Regarding electricity, there are programs in this province for industrial electricity for northerners. We've often heard that these programs should be expanded. But the issue is that for the last 15 years, electricity in this province has been incredibly mismanaged. I think the issue is before the last 15 years, but I don't want to get into a long, long history. The issue started with privatization. Privatization is something you expect Conservatives to do. It's not something you would really expect the government to do.

With this bill, it's all about the worker. They're supporting workers. Three months before the last election, if we can go back four years, do you recall the bill saying that the government was planning to sell Hydro One? No, I don't recall that bill. Does anybody recall that bill? The—

Mr. James J. Bradley: Broadening the ownership.

Mr. John Vanthof: Broadening the ownership of Hydro One so that the people of Ontario, according to the Financial Accountability Officer of Ontario, have to spend another \$1.8 billion. Does anybody recall that bill? That's one of the issues with bills like this, the Fairness in Procurement Act—a great title. It has a purpose. This might need to be done, but does it need to be done now? Does it need to be done the way it's being done, with no details? It basically gives the government carte blanche. Often in this Legislature, we've brought up the issue that, with these framework bills, they talk about all the things that are going to be done—it's going to be retaliatory, steel against steel—but that's not what the bill says. It doesn't say anything about the action having to be reciprocal. It doesn't say anything about that. It gives the government carte blanche. And this government doesn't have, after 15 years, a very good record of carte blanche bills.

The sale of Hydro One is a good example. There's going to be a budget coming up pretty soon. If you remember in that budget before the election, it said something like—and someone will have to help me with the wording; maybe the member from Scarborough Centre—the government was going to review its assets, something like that. It was maybe a bigger word than that. That was translated into selling Hydro One. At no point did the government say, "We're thinking about selling Hydro One. Vote for Kathleen Wynne." No, that's not what it said. It said, "We're going to review our assets," which makes sense. It makes sense for people at

home to review their assets, to review their debts, to review what's going on. That makes sense to everybody. But they didn't say, "We're going to sell Hydro One." That would have been a bit different. I don't think they would have quite got the reception that they got in that election.

That actually is one of the things that distinguishes us very much from both other parties: We're the only ones who want to actually buy Hydro One back. Not everybody agrees with that, but we believe that that would help people across the province. It would specifically help people in rural Ontario and northern Ontario, because privatized delivery of electricity, in the long run, is not going to provide adequate service to the people at the end of the line. That includes businesses at the end of the line, and that includes houses at the end of the line. That, especially for rural Ontario and northern Ontario, is critical, because most of our businesses, be they mines, be they mills, are not easy to service. A privatized deliverer, in the long term, won't provide that service.

When people say, "Oh, no, no, you're all wrong, because the private sector is always more efficient and always provides better service," Speaker, I point to privatized road maintenance. I don't think you'll find anyone in northern Ontario who is going to tell you that since road maintenance was privatized, service has improved.

It's not because the private companies can't do the work. The issue, specifically with the last generation of contracts, is that it's the management that has been turned over to the private sector, and that doesn't work. It doesn't work when you have the private sector—they have kind of a conflict of interest. They have to maximize their profit and provide service. The people who manage those roads, their first goal should be to provide excellent service. That's why management of the roads should be returned to the public sector.

I've got a good note here somewhere that I'm going to—

Mr. Brad Duguid: I can pass you a note.

Mr. John Vanthof: I don't need a note, member from Scarborough Centre.

Speaker, I am forever going to remember where the member is from.

Mr. Brad Duguid: You've never said it so often.

Mr. John Vanthof: No. No.

I've said several times that one of the problems with this legislation—I thank you, Speaker, for your indulgence; I'm going to go back to the legislation—is that it's retaliatory.

This bill is aimed at New York state. If New York state does something—what has been stated here is that if they order that Ontario steel can't be used, then the Ontario government will reciprocate and say that steel from New York state can't be used. That's not the case. The Ontario government could say that we're not going to buy pharmaceuticals, that public bodies can't buy pharmaceuticals, which could very well be a bigger hit to the state. We're not talking apples and apples, and that's

not what the government is actually saying with this legislation. They're saying it in their speeches, but that's not what the legislation says.

In 18 minutes, Speaker—I know Mondays are tough. I am actually going to practise my French in the last 18 minutes:

« Loi concernant l'équité en matière de marchés publics

« Préambule

« Le gouvernement de l'Ontario tient à ce que les marchés publics soient ouverts, équitables et »—ça, c'est un grand mot—« concurrentiels et s'engage à défendre les intérêts économiques de la province et à protéger les intérêts de la population de l'Ontario et des entreprises ontariennes. Au cas où des restrictions seraient imposées à la participation des entreprises ontariennes à des marchés publics, le gouvernement de l'Ontario a besoin du pouvoir de réagir »—ça, c'est un très grand mot—« proportionnellement.

1550

« Pour ces motifs, Sa Majesté, sur l'avis et avec le consentement de l'Assemblée législative de la province de l'Ontario, édicte :

« Définitions

« 1 Les définitions qui suivent s'appliquent à la présente loi.

« “autorité législative américaine” S'entend d'une autorité législative infranationale des États-Unis d'Amérique, notamment un État des États-Unis d'Amérique, le district fédéral de Columbia, les Îles Vierges américaines, tout gouvernement local, territoire ou possession insulaire qui relève des États-Unis d'Amérique, ou toute autre entité infranationale prescrite qui relève des États-Unis d'Amérique. »

Not only can I kind of read French; I can kind of translate it. One of the definitions is what constitutes an American state, and that's all the states in America, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and local governments as well, within the country of the United States.

« Autorité législative américaine »—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Pardon?

Mr. Brad Duguid: Does that include Puerto Rico?

Mr. John Vanthof: It doesn't have Puerto Rico in here. I'm assuming it would be a district, yes.

« “autorité législative américaine fautive” Autorité législative américaine désignée par un règlement pris en vertu du paragraphe 2(1). »

So that's basically the “offending American jurisdiction.”

I'm going to go to the explanatory notes, because the definitions are just too tough for me. They're just too tough for me.

The explanatory notes en français:

« Note explicative

« La Loi de 2018 sur l'équité en matière de marchés publics est édictée. La Loi prévoit que si, de l'avis du ministre, certaines mesures ont été imposées par des

acheteurs provenant d'une autorité législative américaine, le lieutenant-gouverneur en conseil peut désigner celle-ci comme étant une autorité législative américaine fautive.

« La Loi prévoit que la participation de fournisseurs provenant d'autorités législatives américaines fautives à des processus d'approvisionnement lancés par des entités gouvernementales »—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Excuse me. I have to recognize the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on a point of order.

Hon. Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe that just reading from the bill falls under repetition or prohibited reading from Hansard, perhaps, and I ask that you consider that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I thank the minister for her intervention.

We are debating the bill, and I would expect that the member would provide some commentary on the bill. If he's reading the explanatory notes, my expectation would be that he would offer some ideas as to what the bill means. We're not just here to kill time, obviously.

The member for Timiskaming—Cochrane has the floor.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you for that redirection.

I think one of the issues, perhaps the biggest issue, that we're dealing with here is, we all know that—there's a saying: A rising tide floats all boats. By that, free trade floats all countries and floats all provinces, provided that it's fair trade. We need to have rules and regulations and strong regulatory frameworks to ensure that trade is both as fair and as free as possible.

There are certain sectors that each country, each province wants to protect. Food would be an example, where a lot of people would believe that food security is something that each province, certainly a country, would want to protect. What's happening right now on the world stage—and it relates back to Ontario—we've had the CPTPP, the comprehensive trans-Pacific trade agreement, which has opened up doors for the country and for the province, but has also provided some risks. Those risks specifically, which the New Democrats have brought forward, are risk to supply management and risk to the auto sector.

Specifically federally, and also provincially, we have also brought to the government's attention that the New Democrats have been disappointed that the provincial government up until now has not reacted. In the last week or so, I believe the Premier has issued a statement demanding that the federal government provide compensation to both the auto sector and the supply management sector in Ontario.

Another issue that is happening at the same time is the NAFTA negotiations. We'll use supply management and the auto sector; they're also two big issues in the NAFTA negotiations. If you look at them individually, if NAFTA goes badly—and quite frankly, I'm not in a position to know. I know that when I talk to people in my circle, mainly in agriculture, both on the American side and the Canadian side, they are all in favour of NAFTA—of a

new, perhaps an improved NAFTA, but they're all in favour of the basic framework. They are all nervous about the American executive branch's reluctance to negotiate in a way that we're all accustomed to.

When the Premier is now demanding compensation for losses for auto and for supply management and TPP, the issue is, what happens if those losses are magnified with NAFTA, again, with auto and with supply management?

Now, why does this have anything to do with this bill? Well—

Mr. James J. Bradley: That's what I was wondering.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm glad you asked, member from St. Catharines.

When you are in intense, intense negotiations—and many of the people here have, in other walks of life, been involved in tense negotiations—you do not want to be distracted or surprised by something coming out of the blue. This bill, although it looks innocuous and it looks like—the government keeps saying it's only about procurement and that it's about making sure that they're standing up for Ontario, particularly the steel industry. We would also stand up for the steel industry. We have to make sure that this bill isn't used by someone or a group to actually hurt another sector—collateral damage. That, unfortunately, is what has happened with other sectors when this government doesn't take into account or uses tools politically as opposed to taking the longer-term view.

1600

At this point, we've got all these cogs turning. We've got NAFTA turning. At this point, when this government has got such a short window, you would wonder why they didn't do this sooner or just leave it alone until after the election.

Because there's only a three-month—this government is basically a lame-duck government right now. They are. Realistically they are a lame-duck government right now. They are basically talking about putting legislation forward that could be very damaging or could be beneficial. The jury is out. That's the issue.

You have to question whether a lame-duck government is actually—and I believe “lame duck” is actually a term, isn't it?

Mr. Paul Miller: It is.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. At what point does a government become a lame-duck government?

You have to question: Is this bill going to be used to actually help workers, or is it going to be basically in a campaign platform that says, “Oh, look at all the things we've done for the Ontario worker”? They have done a lot of things that damage the Ontario worker. Specifically, high hydro rates have damaged the Ontario worker. We have a lot fewer manufacturing jobs; I believe 300,000 and change less than we had, right?

So you have to question. We are at a more tense trade time than we have ever been. For a lame-duck provincial government—when government members have stated that every state in the United States already has this

legislation, why is this legislation so important right now?

Let's take the time to make sure that it's actually being done. We are in support in principle, as long as it's done for the right reasons, Speaker. I thank you very much for your indulgence.

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

Mr. Brad Duguid: I thoroughly enjoyed listening to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I think I enjoyed it because I may have contributed more to his material than his NDP staffers did for him.

I felt a little bad for him for a while there, because the member said that he is not opposed to ensuring that our industries are treated fairly. I don't think he is personally opposed to that, and evidence of that is the fact he ran out of things to say, but I think his party is opposed to that. I think the member ought to square that with his party, because the fact is, if you don't support this legislation, then you don't support working towards a level playing field for our industries and our workers, plain and simple.

The member also referred to us moving on this because we're in a pre-election mode. Well, first off, I think the member would be kidding himself if he thinks this is a hot election item. I think it's an important thing for the government to do. I don't see it as an election or political piece in any way.

I also think that a subsequent government will be sworn in. It may be us; it may be them; it may be the other guys, but whoever is in power ought to have the ability to be able to respond in kind when a state brings in a protectionist measure, if only to encourage them not to do it.

When I went down with my colleague Michael Chan to New York state to encourage them to reduce the impact on Ontario of the bill that they had—the protectionist bill—they did reduce it somewhat. They didn't reduce it all, and they're still going after steel. Without saying this—and we said this a year ago publicly, that we were going to bring in this bill—they never would have moved. We needed the leverage, so they know that their companies and workers—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's interesting to hear the discussions, and some talk about the members to the left here not being able to fill up the full 60 minutes, when the other side has a hard time filling up 20.

We talk about the bill, and really the necessity to improve our competitive edge here, and we see a government that has done everything against being competitive.

Talking about the steel industry, one day going home last year, there was an employee of the steel industry who got word that they're shutting down the plant in Hamilton because they couldn't afford the power anymore. That shows about being competitive, when you shut down a plant. I'm not sure how many hundreds of workers were being sent home, just because they could no longer afford the power that day.

I had the honour of meeting with somebody in the steel industry closer to home in January, and they had the same issue that day. They were looking at shutting down in the afternoon because of the price of power. They were trying to work the system so that it wouldn't hurt them on another peak day. But they're spending a lot of time and energy. They had a full contingent of staff that day, and they're talking about having them do nothing for four hours and shut down so that they could try to reduce that peak. It might be happening on a day when the government didn't actually have a shortage of power, but that's the system we have in place. We've got companies that are being forced to look at ways of remaining competitive in Ontario, and that shouldn't be an issue that they should be worrying about, especially on a day in the middle of January, when power is not an issue. This is power that I'm sure the government would like to sell to the States, but because of the formula they're having, there are complications around it. This is the challenge that they have, and they're paying staff to review this all through the year—salaries that, really, could be put to better design.

The really sad part—I guess my time is up—is talking about being forced to move.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, I want to make it perfectly clear that procurement policies are very important for any government, before the budget and after the budget. The bottom line here is, and what I think our member was trying to say, have we jumped the gun? Maybe.

I have a tendency to believe that Mr. Trump and his government have put in such policies, and it's so one-sided that our negotiators under NAFTA and any other agreements that are in place or are going to be in place are at a disadvantage, because I, frankly, think they're using bully tactics. I really don't think that our government should stand by or be pushed around by Mr. Trump and his executive.

I believe Canada is strong enough on our own feet. We have natural resources in abundance, and we're in a better position than we think. Our neighbours to the south have to give a little more respect to their neighbours to the north. They have to act in a fair and unbiased way, and I don't think they're doing that. It makes it very difficult for provincial negotiators or federal negotiators to have a fair playing field when the other person isn't even interested in playing fair.

It's about time that all governments—it doesn't matter if it's Liberal, Conservative, NDP or whoever is the future government—stand in their place and be counted and say, "We're not going to put up with this. You're going to act fairly to your northern neighbours, who have always been there for you and have stood up for you, whether it be through wars or depressions or natural disasters. I think we should get special treatment. We're your next-door neighbour. We've been there for you; you've got to be there for us."

I don't think the Americans are stepping up to the plate like they should. They're allowing Mr. Trump and

his executive to bully not only Canada but the world. It has got to stop.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I want to respond to the comments.

First of all, I want to make it very, very clear that while I certainly understand and sympathize with people talking about NAFTA, that's a trade issue. The Ontario government has no jurisdiction in trade issues; that's federal jurisdiction.

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The one place where we do have jurisdiction to stand up to Buy American policies and to show that we actually want to stand up for Ontario is within our public sector procurement policy, and that's what this bill does.

Now, the member from Huron–Bruce talked about things like "buy Alaska" food, buying agricultural products in New Mexico and a whole bunch of things that have been in place for—we don't compete in that space. That's not what we're concerned about. What we're concerned about is the increasing number of jurisdictions that we see in the US that have Buy American policies with respect to things like steel and IT and those things which are public sector procurement.

Ontario has a huge, billion-dollar infrastructure program. What we want to ensure is that if a state which is a major trading partner says, "We're not going to buy Ontario steel anymore," Ontario has the authority to say, "Then we're not buying US steel." If you're talking about government public sector procurement of construction materials with billions of dollars of infrastructure, that does give us some teeth; that does give us some leverage. We think it's important that we stand up for Ontario workers and use what leverage we've got. It's not a lot, but we're using what we've got.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for Timiskaming–Cochrane can reply.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the member from Scarborough Centre, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the member from Guelph for responding to my comments.

I would like to specifically start with the member from Guelph. This is public procurement policy; it's very important. If this bill actually said that it was reciprocal—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: But it's not. It doesn't say that. It doesn't say that. It says that if an American jurisdiction does something, our government can do something, but not necessarily reciprocal. It says retaliatory; it doesn't say reciprocal. So what the member from Guelph just said would make sense, but that's not what this bill says. That's what we're having so much trouble with.

Several times it's been said—very straightforward. If the state of New York states that if it's over a million dollars, you are forbidden from using St. Marys cement, and if the bill then said it would be reciprocal, that the Ontario government would not allow New York cement in that bridge, that would be fine, or that would make

sense. But that's not what this bill says. The bill says that the Ontario government can take retaliatory action, whatever it feels like.

I agree that the Ontario government isn't involved in trade. But trade is a very hot issue right now, and anything we say or do could antagonize these negotiations. This bill, if it said "steel for steel; cement for cement," would be much less antagonistic than retaliatory action. Your comments are not what the bill says.

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

Mr. Toby Barrett: I welcome the opportunity to address Bill 194, the Fairness in Procurement Act. As we've heard in debate this afternoon, New York state has passed legislation, or has legislation coming forward, that will in effect, on April 1, mandate that only American-made steel may be procured for certain infrastructure projects. Texas, for example, has similar legislation that came in in September which placed Buy American requirements on iron and steel in highway and construction projects. Now we see that Ontario, ostensibly as a result, has tabled legislation that will allow the province to respond in kind to New York's legislation—and, theoretically, to any other state, for that matter.

We have Bill 194, the Fairness in Procurement Act, that has been introduced in Ontario as a threat, if you will, as an attempt to try and deal with the state laws, bearing in mind that there appear to be countless other laws and bills like this one already on the books throughout the United States. To date, this Ontario government was not dealing with any of them. This goes well back, probably, beyond President Obama's Buy American program, and something we heard an awful lot about during the last North American recession 10 years ago.

Initiating a trade war now with the United States during what continues to be a critical time during the ongoing and extended NAFTA negotiations really appears to be reckless and a bit of a last-ditch ploy to, in my view, shift some of the blame for Ontario's disastrous economic policies—whether it's high taxes, high energy costs or the plethora of suffocating bureaucratic red tape.

It's a threat to what has been worked on over the past year and two months now. Many of us have been actively lobbying and communicating with American leaders with respect to NAFTA. These kinds of relationships are so important. There is a link with NAFTA. This undermines the work that is being done, not only at the federal level but at the provincial and state level, with respect to maintaining a modicum of, ideally, a modernized NAFTA program. I myself just in the past year have attended four conferences in the United States to continue to build up those relationships. There is one conference I attend every year. I might mention that I pay my own way to go down there. This issue is very serious, Speaker. Over several years, I've built up what I consider those all-important relationships with state-elected—not so much federal but state-elected farmers and ranchers, those people—in central America, the south, Texas, who have benefited tremendously from NAFTA. They will say that, and Secretary of Agriculture Perdue will say and various

state commissioners in agriculture will say that the benefits for the US farmer have been very significant as a result of NAFTA.

Now we've got this bit of a monkey wrench being thrown into the mix. I'm not sure why the Liberals didn't speak when their turn came up. They surely can't have run out of things to say about this. Maybe there's a lack of knowledge or lack of awareness of this. But to rush through what essentially seems to be a knee-jerk reaction—obviously without fulsome debate, as has just been exhibited a few minutes ago. Why are we not seeing the putting forward of a well-crafted, well-thought-out, meaningful response to these kinds of American policies that can have a significant impact on Ontario and certainly on our steel industry?

I'm not aware of to what extent government politicians and staff have been in New York state consulting, or to what extent they've been negotiating, rather than to swing around and pass a law up here, passed by Ontario politicians to essentially throw something in the face of legislators and people in New York state. I think it has been said before that we in the official opposition will not support this kind of retaliation. It's premature. It's a very weak response and something that would not be expected of either a federal or provincial level of government.

We all have to be aware that, given the change in administration south of the border, we in Ontario—and right across Canada—we realize we must up our game.

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On May 18 last year, US trade representative Robert Lighthizer gave notice of intent to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement—NAFTA—with Canada and Mexico. At that announcement he cited outdated standards and regulations; a fair comment that would be accurate to some extent. Lighthizer stressed the need for higher-paying jobs in the US. That was the reason given.

The President has repeatedly stated he would tear up NAFTA. I'd like to think he has maybe modified his view somewhat there, given the feedback that he has received at the state level. To tear up NAFTA, to make a move like that, we know, would require sign-off from the US Congress. However, the US President can unilaterally sign executive orders—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Point of order, the member for Huron—Bruce.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Do we have a quorum?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We will have to ascertain as to whether or not we have a quorum.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Call in the members.

The Acting Speaker ordered the bells rung.

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. The member for Haldimand—Norfolk has the floor.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I regret the Liberals won't speak to this bill, and they won't even sit in their House. There must be something going on behind the scenes over there. Perhaps we'll find out.

As I indicated, the US President, sure, he could talk about this and that. He requires the sign-off of Congress. However, the President can unilaterally sign executive orders regarding tariffs. I'm concerned that, on occasion, President Trump has voiced displeasure about our agricultural supply management system. He has slapped new import duties on softwood lumber ranging from 3% to 24%, which obviously has an immediate and serious consequence for our all-important forestry sector.

These kinds of moves pale in comparison to the border tax the President is touting. This would be a massive border adjustment tax, the BAT, designed solely to protect US jobs. Again, we've heard that. It remains unclear whether the target is strictly Asia's parts suppliers, or whether Mexico and Canada would be dragged in. The BAT program also encompasses a proposed massive cut to the corporate tax rate, from 35% down to 15%, and includes proposals for a 15% tax rate for all businesses, lower individual rates, larger standard deductions for households and a repeal of the estate tax.

I know recently President Trump addressed the national farm bureau, just a month or so ago. It may have been in Tennessee. Seven million farmers are members. They really welcomed, given the succession issues that we have in agriculture in North America, Trump's proposal to get rid of the death tax. Under his plan, average US business will pay about a 20% tax rate after accounting for state taxes. We have to up our game: Canada's average combined federal-provincial rate is in the order of 27%.

Since last spring, the federal government and many provinces—and I recognize the work of the province of Ontario—have scrambled to put together a lobbying effort to persuade US states and the Trump administration to leave Canada out of these protectionist measures—the kind of measures the government should be debating this afternoon but doesn't seem to be interested in talking about.

There's mention of the importance of our embedded, cross-border integration. Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall described it this way, as far as the cross-border supply chains: "Saskatchewan farmers buy John Deere tractors, made in Iowa, to harvest oats that are then sold to General Mills in Cedar Rapids, turned into Cheerios and exported back to Canada."

One of the conferences I attended earlier this year, in January, was in Kansas City. Again, I paid my own way to go down there. I convinced my wife to go on a winter holiday in Kansas and Oklahoma. I might mention we will not be doing that again. We will not be doing that next winter. The Canadian government provided lunch on one of the days at this Kansas City conference, again, to really make clear the importance of Canada and United States trade. They served hamburgers coming from cow-calf out of Alberta and finished somewhere in the United

States. The meat was processed in Nebraska, the tomatoes came from Ontario and the lettuce came from Mexico. We are so integrated that any thought of any half-baked retaliation or serious battles between New York state and Ontario just flies in the face of a very good trading relationship that we have.

In my family, my cousins run cattle in California. They bring their calves up from Mexico. I have other relatives who run cattle in eastern Oregon, and they ship to railhead down in Nevada. Again, it probably ends up in Kansas City or perhaps in Nebraska for processing.

There's no question the United States is Ontario's primary destination for international exports. It represents 80.5% of the total. Those are 2015 figures. We cannot mess with that kind of relationship with any kind of ill-thought-out legislation we're debating today.

On the energy front, the US administration has promised cheaper energy. We know they walked away from the Paris climate change agreement. We have a cap-and-trade tax that alone puts business and industry at a \$2-billion-a-year competitive disadvantage with neighbouring jurisdictions. We see policies—US-Canada policies, US-Ontario policies—going in completely opposite directions. Minimum wage, for example: You're not seeing those kinds of minimum wages in Ontario. I know driving down to Kansas City and going through the state of Missouri, I would see the signs posted, "We compete with the state of Missouri." Their minimum wage is \$7 an hour; ours is heading towards \$15.

The ambitious attack on red tape: They talk about it as the most ambitious attack since the Reagan era, cutting regulation and capping the total cost of rules. He—referring to the President—signed an order calling on one in and two out with respect to regulation and, in some cases, dealing with the EPA and the labour department, where they have to identify two existing regulations to be scrapped, and oftentimes we see something in the order of 22 regulations being scrapped.

So we're messing with the world's largest economy with this business, this law with respect to New York state. If the world's largest economy does take off, as it appears to be, a rising tide will lift all boats, including ours in Ontario. On the other hand, if we can't match these kinds of tax cuts and deregulation and infrastructure spending—unfortunately, the kind we're seeing now with the Buy American rider—it could pose some serious problems for our businesses: our businesses based in the United States as well, and certainly those businesses resting on this side of the border.

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So, Speaker, in spite of Bill 194, which is being attempted here, the case truly remains for open, reciprocal trade within North America. This New York state legislation against the steel we produce and Ontario's ill-advised proposed retaliation flies in the face of the fact that the US and Canada boast one of the largest trading relationships in the world. No other country buys more goods and services that are made in the USA than Canada, to the tune of \$322 billion a year. Canada

supports nine million US jobs. We have to go into this with our eyes wide open, without any thought of introducing what I consider some pretty serious legislation that may upset people on the other side of the border.

As I've explained, we're linked through just-in-time supply chains, whether it's Cheerios, auto parts, hamburgers or steel. It is key for our tremendous advancements in investment and productivity, our competitiveness on both sides of the border, and the benefits to Mexico as well. There is more work that has to be done with Mexico as far as our system of common rules and harmonized regulation.

When I attend these conferences and I talk to a US farmer or a US rancher, we recognize that any gains in our agribusiness/agricultural economy have been the result of trade. There are just not enough of us to eat the food or consume the products coming from the US or Ontario or Canadian farms. That kind of trade has resulted in an unprecedented growth in prosperity and, of course, the jobs that go with it.

There are threats. In my view, the threats are from Mexico and China, whether it be steel or manufacturing. Certainly, with China and Asia, in the future we probably won't be able to produce enough food to maintain their rapidly growing populations.

So we see legislation that has been thrown through the window during a time of uncertainty. The negotiations commenced last August. Fortunately, the negotiations have been extended; that's a good thing. We like to think that the negotiations do not result in throwing something out or bringing in laws to completely block steel or to completely block milk or things like that. What we need is modernization and to bring some of this stuff up to date.

Ideally, we turn free trade into fair trade; essentially, that's how trading relationships are supposed to work. Trade dollars flow back and forth in a fair and balanced way—not the protectionist blocking of steel at the Ontario/New York state border and the equally protectionist tactic of excluding US suppliers from participating in the procurement process.

Speaker, there is much more to this relationship than jobs, the economy and data. The US and Canada—Ontario and New York state—have been friends and allies from, barring a few dust-ups, back to colonial times. We share a century of military history, fighting together in defence of common values: in World War I, World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War and, most recently, the Middle East and Afghanistan. Officers are embedded on both sides of the border in the army, navy and air force. We work together as two nations to look after air and water quality; 40% of our border is water.

So Godspeed to the ongoing NAFTA negotiations. The last thing we need is any kind of ill-advised legislation coming out of the Ontario government that hasn't been thought through that would throw a monkey wrench into these kinds of discussions, negotiations and good relationships.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk for his contributions to this very important bill, Bill 194—another bill with “fairness” in it. There's a big theme: fairness.

But he pointed out something that I also was concerned about, which is how the government did not complete their full hour on this bill. I would have appreciated their discussion or arguments or presentation on this hour lead, to try to give us more perspective and explanation as to the intent of the bill. We interpret it the way we've read it. I've had an opportunity to look the bill over, and I'll be doing a further debate in 20 minutes.

I also understand that the government—and I hope I'm wrong—isn't putting up another speaker for the rotation. That's disappointing again.

We heard from one of the members earlier that this bill is a likeness bill. For an example, someone mentioned that if New York isn't going to give us steel, then we're not going to give them steel. That's what one of the members has said. It's exactly that kind of back-and-forth. The reciprocating agreement is not there. We say it's a retaliation of what the States is doing.

We also are concerned because, really, this is a federal issue. Right now, there's lots of talk around NAFTA and the trade agreements that are there. Maybe this is really not the approach we need to jump on. Maybe we need to see how those things work out before we start bringing in this kind of retaliation legislation.

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

L'hon. Nathalie Des Rosiers: Il me fait plaisir de me lever pour défendre le projet de loi.

I thought it might be important to restate a little bit what the purpose of this bill is and why it is necessary. In my view, it is because Ontario views itself and sees itself as a trade nation that it does require some ability at times to respond in a proportionate nature to measures that would have been installed to curtail trade. Indeed, the preamble of this bill is quite clear that it is not an invitation to become completely protectionist at any whim of the time. It says very specifically that it is only in the context where restrictions have been imposed on Ontario goods and services that then a minister may, if deemed appropriate, respond proportionately. The word “proportionality” is there, and that's a very important aspect.

It simply gives an additional leverage to ensure that there is some respect, some fairness and some credibility given to our negotiators when they are in Washington, when they are in New York, when they are talking to different governors, to say that we are serious about having good trade relationships, but we want reciprocity. We want to make sure that if you are imposing barriers there, we will do the same. So it gives a little bit of teeth to the negotiations.

That's the purpose of the bill. It is not an invitation to go out and be a protectionist, at any rate. It is really a tool that will be given to a minister, and to a government, to respond in proportional terms to a threat to Ontario businesses.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: First of all, I'd like to commend the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. He is a sincere champion of our agri-food sector in Ontario. I admire the work that he does not only in his riding but across the province and throughout North America, making sure that he is well informed and positioned to help shape Ontario's agri-food sector as we go forward. We need all the expertise that we can get, because when we have a government throwing retaliatory measures on the table, we need to stand tall.

As the leader of our party pointed out last week, the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario does not support retaliation. Retaliation is the weakest possible response a government can ever have. It's painfully obvious that this has to do with nothing more than an election ploy made by an out-of-touch, out-of-ideas government. Quite simply, we need to have a government that stands tall.

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The leader of our party shared last week a letter that he got from an American colleague that dates back to his time when he was mayor of Nipissing. It reads, "I wanted to send you a short note to commend the letters that you recently sent to your American counterpart about the impact that restrictions to free and open markets can have on jobs in Canada and the United States. Your effort to explain the great success story of the bilateral trade relationship between Canada and the United States and the positive impact it is having on communities is most powerful."

That's the springboard we should be on. We should be looking at strong bilateral relationships, as opposed to retaliatory aspects that this government is employing just because there's an election a couple of months down the road. We can do better with better policies. Stay tuned.

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

Mr. John Vanthof: It's a pleasure to respond to the member from Haldimand–Norfolk. Although we do disagree on many things policy-wise, it's obvious that we both share a respect for people in agriculture and an understanding of how important agriculture is to this province and to the people of this country, and of how bills like this could be used in ways that are not intended.

I appreciate the remarks from the Minister of Natural Resources and certainly respect her knowledge.

From our perspective, it would be much better if the bill itself was a bit more prescriptive, and not just the preamble. We all know, in this heightened trade environment we are in now, a bill could be intended for one thing and could be used for something else. I think that's what the member from Haldimand–Norfolk and I share.

I think everyone on this side understands—specifically, the New Democratic Party understands—that the government of Ontario needs the tools to be able to deal with other jurisdictions, but we need to make sure that the legislation is prescriptive enough that it can't be used

in ways that will cause collateral damage. This legislation needs to be more prescriptive. If it was more than just the preamble that stated that the actions would be reciprocal and not simply retaliatory, it would make this bill much more palatable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's four questions and comments. We're now going back to the member for Haldimand–Norfolk to reply.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Just a parting comment: I appeal to this government to put this legislation on the shelf. Take a bit of a breather. You've got to go over the border and have some discussions, do a bit of wining and dining and continue to build on the relationships that you have been building up over the past year, because there's really a tremendous potential opportunity here. If NAFTA can be truly modernized, and I feel it will, it's going to set the stage for all concerned to expand their reach and to grow their markets, not suffocate or shrink their markets—in this case, with respect to steel. Success has always been to work together, to make trade work.

I give an example: Ontario's Minister of Agriculture, the agriculture critic for the third party and myself had an opportunity late last year to join members of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, NASDA, and their counterparts in Mexico and Canada. We met in Denver. It was a meeting of the Tri-National Agricultural Accord. Again, NAFTA dominated the discussions. We knew people down there. It focused on agriculture and agribusiness. We saw a consensus where all three countries signed a communiqué—this was just a few months ago—stressing the necessity of NAFTA, calling on respective federal governments—this is why the state level and provincial level are so important—to ensure that a modernized NAFTA in this case doesn't hurt agriculture and stressed that senior federal decision-makers maintain a legally binding dispute resolution system. We've been guaranteed—sure, we're at the state and provincial level—that communiqué, that agreement, landed on the appropriate desk in Washington.

This is what you do. You negotiate.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to rise to contribute to this debate on Bill 194 and add my comments.

I have looked at the bill and I read the explanatory note. In this particular context, I don't see anything that talks about reciprocating agreements. I also read the preamble, and again, it isn't very descriptive of the reciprocal agreements that this government says are the intent of the bill. Really, this bill is a reaction to Buy American laws for steel and iron being debated and adopted in New York state and Texas.

New Democrats believe that trading with our neighbours is important. We hold that belief when the relationship benefits both parties. We will certainly support efforts to make sure that those relationships are preserved and we have access to American procurement contracts for Ontario businesses. We think it's important that we have those trading relationships.

However, once again, I think this Liberal government is attempting to govern through regulation in the case of this bill. So much of the detail of the piece of legislation will take place at the discretion of the minister. It's truly like signing a blank contract. We don't know what the terms of reference are. There is a framework here, but it's not detailed. We all know what happens if you don't know the details of something. You can certainly get into situations that you didn't anticipate.

There will be no healthy and democratic debate about the specifics of the measures because it's just a framework. We are being asked to trust that the minister and the Premier will have the best interests of all Ontarians at heart in every action they contemplate under the auspices of this legislation, and that they will conduct these actions in a sensitive manner that will not provoke a trade war. That's what they're asking us to do as legislators, and the public at large: to trust this government.

As I understand this bill, the cabinet "may make regulations designating an American jurisdiction as an offending American jurisdiction if ... the government of the American jurisdiction has enacted legislation or ... provided direction to ... apply requirements, restrictions, policies, sanctions or other measures that may inhibit or prevent Ontario suppliers from participating or succeeding in procurement processes...."

Suppliers from offending American jurisdictions will be "subject to the requirements, restrictions, policies, sanctions or other measures set out in the regulations." Again, "set out in the regulations." We don't know what those regulations will look like because regulations don't come back here for debate.

However, despite the preamble, there are no requirements in the legislation that the regulatory response to any Buy American policies be proportional or reciprocal. There is only the requirement that the regulation be retaliatory. This means that if New York state passes legislation that says they must buy US steel, Ontario would not be required to pass reciprocal legislation that the province must buy Ontario steel or cannot buy New York steel. Instead, Ontario could pass legislation saying that the province can't buy New York pharmaceuticals or software.

There is no requirement to act when a Buy American policy is enacted. The only real requirement is that any measures taken under the act can only be done in retaliation to a Buy American law that has been enacted or a directive that has been issued.

Speaker, I urge the members in this House to really consider the debate that's happening on this side. Not too often do the Conservatives talk about how they don't want to see retaliation. They're a party that believes in consequences to actions. Therefore, if they're saying this is retaliatory and we're saying it's retaliatory, chances are, if it looks like a duck and walks like a duck, it's a duck.

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We are debating here today, really, enabling legislation only. The substance of the act will be determined through regulations on an ad hoc basis at the whim of the

minister responsible for Treasury Board. We are not really able to debate the merits of the bill, only whether or not the government of Ontario should be given the broad authority to act against a valued trading partner, and we're being asked to do so without knowing exactly what actions are being contemplated. That's what it is. It's really a framework for how the government wants to set up those regulations.

New Democrats are concerned that this antagonistic move during the NAFTA renegotiations could jeopardize the livelihoods of the people and the businesses in this province that rely on a good trading relationship with our largest trading partner, the United States, not to mention that Ontario is the only province in Canada that has started this process, under this Legislature. We have to ask why it is that Ontario is pursuing this sort of response to the Buy American campaign while, again, there's no other jurisdiction in Canada that is doing the same.

Given that the real potential exists to escalate a trade war that could seriously disadvantage Ontario workers and their families, we need to know that this government is proceeding cautiously and diplomatically and not just deploying a political communication strategy in advance.

Again, we talk about a provincial election that's just around the corner. Ontario businesses and our workers cannot be collateral damage to another desperate Liberal re-election ploy. It's very concerning, because we know there is an election on the horizon and this government has got a lot of work to do to get the people of Ontario back on board, looking at their government as a viable party to govern. So we have to ask if this is another way of convincing people that they should be government.

I refer to the Premier's remarks when she stood up here in the House and talked about this legislation. There were a couple of quotes I've noted here. She said, "Everyone on this side of the House would have preferred for it not to come to this, but in the face of unfair discrimination we will not blink." That sounds kind of retaliatory to me: "we will not blink." The other one she said here was, "To be very clear, we do not want to escalate this matter." But indeed the legislation talks about retaliatory and escalating matters if another state decides to do something they feel is not fair trade, so to speak, to Ontario.

Ontario, again, is the only province that has taken these actions against the United States. The Liberal government should be looking to their federal counterparts, who are trade experts, where this is an issue, to handle this sensitive issue during a period of heightened protectionist rhetoric. This is about more than Liberal re-election dreams; it's about the future of our economy.

When I look at the fact that this is a federal issue, there are many things this government has brought forward to this House—or a couple of things, and I'll give an example. One of them was the provincial retirement plan. It went full force on that, and we agreed with that legislation. We should have an Ontario pension plan. But we also talked about how they need to talk to the federal government and work on making this a policy decision so that it could benefit everyone as well. This

government spent to the tune of, if I'm not mistaken, around \$75 million on all the background work, and after all that was said and done, then there were changes federally to the pension and that was dropped.

The other one that we're going to talk about is pharmacare. We think pharmacare should be universal in Ontario. The government came up with a version of pharmacare, and now I understand the federal government is going to talk about a national pharmacare plan.

So maybe reaching out to their federal partner on this is a good idea before they rush into this legislation, and having conversations with their federal MPs to bring these concerns to the table.

Speaker, I have heard from constituents in my riding, and I'm sure we've all had these stories about the problems in our own local businesses. Small businesses are really the heart of our communities. They've been trying to compete for contracts with the government of Ontario, and whether they are trying to supply goods and services to our schools or whether they would like to engage in research and development for the Ministry of Energy, our small businesses are often stymied. If we can develop a process or a path where small businesses can actually be part of the procurement policy, that would actually help businesses to grow and thrive in Ontario and create more jobs. Our small and medium-sized businesses feel they don't get a fair shot at our own procurement contracts. This government should be focusing on increasing opportunities for Ontario-based businesses to bid and win our own government contracts.

For example, we shouldn't be making changes like this government made to the vendor-of-record list for procuring external IT consultants. If you all read the Auditor General's report, these changes made it virtually impossible for local and medium-sized IT consulting firms to get on the VOR list and paved the way for large multinational corporations to win these government contracts. Again, there are ways that we can engage our own talent here in Ontario in the IT sector. That was one example the Auditor General used.

Another barrier to our own local small businesses in winning government contracts are the high fees associated with making a bid. Even the Auditor General, again, noted that this was a concern, as recently as 2016. You're squeezing out small businesses that could potentially grow by having these high fees.

I'd also like to share the views of some of the organizations that represent the views of the affected workers here in Canada.

It's really important that we talk about the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. I met with them today, and they talked about procurement in health care. That was the lens they were using. They want good health care in their cities and in their communities—rural, northern and urban—so that they will attract businesses and workers and have access to health care.

They brought these things forward, and one of the topics they talked about was called "Building Healthy Communities." I'm sure other MPPs also met with the

Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They had four priorities under this heading of building healthy communities.

The first priority: to ensure that "land use planning and development regulations are aligned to increase density and create more housing stock." They're talking about bringing people to their cities and communities, because they know when they're there, they're going to be consumers of their businesses.

Building "adaptable and resilient infrastructure stock that can address future pressures": They're talking about information-gathering and how that is going to be part of what the government's plan is to grow small business.

"Develop a single transportation authority in the greater Toronto-Hamilton area": Again, they're talking about transit. It's a very hot topic.

Then they also talked about striking a "health cabinet to improve information-sharing and break down budget silos between ministries." We know that we have to do a better job of communication between ministries when it comes to issues. If we don't talk to each other, we don't know what one or the other ministry is doing, and complementing those policies going forward would be very good.

And then: reforming the "procurement and supply chain processes within the Ontario health care system." That's what they were talking about. These are local initiatives that the chamber of commerce brought forward.

Their official quote, though, is: "Positive diplomatic relations should always be our priority when it comes to trade discussions. With the Fairness in Procurement Act, we understand that the government's intention is to respond to barriers rather than escalate them." That's what their understanding is, and that's what the Premier said: "To be very clear, we do not want to escalate this matter."

They go on, saying, "No other province in Canada has legislation in place that would escalate trade sanctions when they occur.

"The Ontario Chamber of Commerce believes that the best approach for Ontario is the formation of positive bilateral co-operation with our American neighbours. This is the approach the Premier and her government have taken to date and they must continue to do so."

They're very clear, as business people, how you build business relationships. If you're putting this legislation in place, it's not sending the message to the neighbours that you actually want to have that collaboration, that you want to have them come to the table in bilateral co-operation so both parties can benefit. That's what they've said.

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I have to say that I do agree that we need to be very careful. When we engage in trade negotiations, we need to be able to trust that our leaders will take the correct actions that are in proportion to the situation and not to aggravate it, worsening relations between our countries and the lives of our workers and their families. That is not a good thing.

Again, I point to the fact that federal negotiations are happening right now all over the world with trade. This is

the opportunity we have where we can talk to our federal partners and express the uniqueness of our province. Southwestern Ontario is one of those areas that has a \$1-billion industry under agri-food, and we need better procurement policies for that sector. We also have our auto sector. That's another one where I think we need to do better when it comes to trade and procurement. We're not exercising those policies here in our own province in order to grow those industries.

I'm from southwestern Ontario. They are very core, important industries and sectors to a thriving London, as an example. In London, probably our number one sector right now is agriculture. We have industry and factories popping up throughout my riding, and we're so pleased we're able to thrive and grow that industry. Speaking for myself, Speaker, I want to know that we are procuring locally. It's really important that I know where my food comes from. In Ontario and the country of Canada, we have really stringent legislation around food security—what comes in and the standards that we have. I think we need to really look at southwestern Ontario and those two industries and try to do better so that they can flourish.

As leaders, we need to learn and trust fundamentally what this government's legislation is proposing. Premier Wynne needs to strongly defend Ontario under the CPTPP; absolutely. We need to deal with making sure that it's not just a framework when this legislation comes into place.

Another piece I was reading when I looked at the bill—again, we didn't get a full one-hour lead from the government. It would be nice if someone could expand on this for me, but, again, I fear it's more of a framework rather than details in legislation. On page 2, under "Enforcement," the topic is "Contract void." It says, "A procurement contract entered into by a broader public sector entity is void if the procurement contract or the process by which it was entered into contravenes this act or a regulation made under this act, unless the minister by order validates it." Again, the minister has a lot of power.

The other piece, if you follow down page 2, under "Limitations on remedies," under the topic of "No compensation": "Despite any other act or law, no person is entitled to any compensation for any loss or damages, including loss of revenues or loss of profit, arising from the enactment, repeal or application of this act, the making, revocation or application of any regulation or order made under this act or anything done or not done in accordance with this act or a regulation or order made under this act." You have no right to challenge this government for compensation should there be a problem under this act. That's the way I've read it.

There is so much to this bill. It is truly a framework, because when you see how many pages—we don't want an omnibus bill, so it would be nice, truly, to get to the point of the bill; absolutely. There are four pages here so it is skeletal; it is a framework. I don't know how quickly this government wants to push this bill through—because we know that we're almost at March. We've got all of March and all of April and then we're going to be shortly into an election.

How much consultation is going to be done in committee on this bill? How much time are we going to be able to debate this bill on third reading if they're going to rush it through? They're not putting up speakers, so you tend to think that they want this six hours of debate to come very quickly, so they can move it on. I don't think that is a good start to a trade bill. You've got to open up debate to have an understanding of where this government—what direction it is.

But for now, what it looks like is a lot of regulation, a lot of framework, and nobody really knows the details of what this bill means. The intent of the bill may not be this, but it comes across as a retaliation to US states who put in trade laws that aren't friendly to us.

We think we should be looking at those things and taking steps, but I think this bill falls short in the details, and we're concerned about that.

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

Mr. Brad Duguid: I'm delighted to get up one more time today, and it will be the last time I get up, I expect—although I see my colleague across there from Chatham-Kent—

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Lambton-Kent-Middlesex.

Mr. Brad Duguid: Lambton-Kent—with binders on his desk. That usually means he's going to speak soon.

I just want to say it is really important that we give our government and future governments this tool, because most states have that already. New York state, for instance, already has a reciprocal ability where, if a government discriminates against their workers or their businesses, they can respond in kind. If we don't have that ability, and we go into discussions with another state that's bringing in a Buy American policy—something that is fairly rampant with a fairly protectionist regime right now in the US, with all the NAFTA discussions going on—we want to be able to say to them, "Look, we're spending \$190 billion on infrastructure over the next number of years, probably more than most states are spending. If you want your businesses to have access to that procurement, if you want your steel companies to have access to those projects, then ours have to have the same." I just think that's inherently fair. In fact, if we weren't doing that, I think the NDP would be standing up in absolute anger, saying that we should be.

Right now, I'm sensing that the opposition parties are turning themselves into pretzels, trying to find ways to oppose this.

I would suggest that, first off, this isn't political. This is not a big political win. Who's paying attention to this right now? Not a heck of a lot of people.

It's an important policy. It's important to have the ability to respond if, and only if, it's necessary. Our Premier is working hard to increase trade, but we do need that response mechanism, if required.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I listened intently to the member's 20 minutes—from London–Fanshawe.

I think that if you're going to try to wave a big stick at somebody, you'd better have one. I think this is more going to infuriate people across the border than it's going to help us out.

We are next to a pretty big country—10 times our population. The economy is huge. Really, if we get to threatening them too much, they certainly can retaliate against us in a bigger fashion, I think, than what we're expecting the other way.

I've been across the border many times, when I was hauling livestock. I went to Kentucky, Iowa and Indiana, as well as across Canada, with livestock. A lot of the time, it's a product that people want. That's why they import and export products: because people want those products. It's not a matter of us in Canada saying, "You must take our livestock because we're threatening you," because that usually never works.

I'm afraid that we might get into a tussle with the United States, or with the border states, on this type of thing if we bring legislation out that has these words or these threats in it.

I hope the government takes a real serious look at the way it's worded and what they hope to accomplish. To me, as I said before, if you're going to try to get tough with somebody, you'd better be able to do that. I worry that we may not be in that position.

1710

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

Mr. Paul Miller: First of all, I would like to compliment the member from London–Fanshawe for the diligent research she did. It was very informative. Thank you very much.

Secondly, I don't normally throw out compliments, but the government, frankly, in this is doing the right thing here. We have to protect our businesses and our people in Ontario, especially with what's going on in the world right now. I guess—the former minister called it an administration. I think it's more like a dictatorship in the States, but that's beside the point. We have to defend our resources, our people and our jobs. We can't stand and be pushed around. I've said this before and I'll say it again: The federal government has to stand up and they have to make it quite clear that Canada has been a good trading partner. We have been a good neighbour, we've been there—you name it, through wars, through depressions, through disasters—we've been there for the Americans. For them to single us out or make us pay the price, so to speak—then naturally we are going to retaliate and we are going to stand up for our businesses, especially in the steel industry.

I spent most of my life in the steel industry. We're just starting—just a touch getting back on our feet in Hamilton, and this guy Trump is going to pull the legs out from underneath us again with tariffs. It's outrageous and he's doing it to his own people because the people

who bought Stelco—former Stelco—are called Bedrock and they're from New York City.

So it's kind of counterproductive; he's going against his own business people in the States to put tariffs on us. It's ridiculous. So, yes, the Ontario government—I don't care who is sitting over there—did the right thing. We would have to do the right thing to defend our people, defend our businesses, and defend our jobs.

I will continue to support any efforts by this province to stand up to these unfair practices that are being even thought about down there in Washington. They should start thinking about, well, if they do it to us maybe the things are going to go back their way. In this particular situation, the government is doing the right thing.

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

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I'd like to thank the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek for his support on this issue, because I think we've spent a lot of time as a government thinking about the steel industry and Hamilton particularly, and looking at the behaviour of American owners of Canadian steel plants saying, "Well, we're just going to move the production to the US because there are so many US states that have Buy American policies that it's to our advantage to move production out of Ontario into the US because then we qualify for Buy American." We need to do something about that. And quite frankly, I've been astounded by what I've heard from the opposition parties largely this afternoon, because this isn't—we didn't start Buy American, Speaker. There are already all kinds of states that already have Buy American.

We have a Premier—people have talked, "Oh, well, you should just build relationships." Nobody has spent more time in the US talking to state governors and building state relationships. In fact, she has been down there most of the last week at the US governors' conference talking to the US governors. She has been to 38 states—that are major trading partners—building relationships. We're doing that. But you also need to show a bit of backbone. And with the exception of the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, what I hear across the aisle today is a singular lack of backbone to stand up for Ontario workers, for Ontario businesses.

When they are threatened by Buy American policies, we're going to stand up for our Canadian workers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. The member for London–Fanshawe.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Holy smokes. I have to tell you, I want to thank the member from Scarborough Centre, the members from Perth–Wellington and Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and the member from Guelph.

Speaker, this is legislation that is a framework. There are no details in this legislation. It's left for regulation. Whether we agree or not about any legislation in this House, we need to know what's in it. We need to know how it is affecting Ontarians. We need to know how it's affecting our industries and our sectors before we just give this government blank authority to decide what steps

to take. Should US states have some trading barriers to Ontario? We need to know what they are.

I read one of the particular examples, and I'll read it again because it's really troublesome to me. On page 2—I want to hear from this government. I wish the minister would have taken his full hour and talked about each one of these pieces in a small way.

The “No compensation” part: “(2) Despite any other act or law, no person is entitled to any compensation for any loss or damages, including loss of revenues or loss of profit, arising from the enactment, repeal or application of this act, the making, revocation or application of any regulation or order made under this act or anything done or not done in accordance with this act or a regulation or order made under this act.”

It says, “No compensation.”

I'd like an explanation why that was put in there. We haven't had the opportunity to hear from this government like I'd like to. I'm really interested in knowing a little more about this detail and this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking forward to speaking this afternoon to Bill 194, the Fairness in Procurement Act.

I first would like to begin by just taking a minute to thank Minister Hoskins, Ontario's health minister. We've all heard in the last little while that he is moving on from Queen's Park. I just personally want to wish him all the best in his future endeavors, and to say that I think he's been an outstanding minister. We had issues with the Wallaceburg Sydenham hospital and the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance in the last couple of years, and I just want to thank him. On numerous occasions, he picked up the phone to call me to ask me for my advice. I can say that I've actually worked quite closely with him to restore some services back to the Sydenham hospital, to deal with some of the management issues that the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance was having and some of the governance issues. So to Minister Hoskins, I wish you all the best, and I know we will miss you here at Queen's Park.

But getting back to Bill 194: To be quite frank, the Wynne Liberal policies are responsible for Ontario losing its competitive advantage to the United States. I had an opportunity this afternoon to meet with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce to go through their Vote Prosperity, the 2018 election platform of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. They raised a number of issues on how we can make Ontario more competitive. I'll go through those suggestions shortly.

This is the government that sells electricity at a loss to the States while shipping billions of dollars to California through the cap-and-trade scheme, which burdens Ontario businesses and families with red tape and unaffordable taxes.

The Wynne Liberal government loves to change its tune on trade. For example, in 2013 the Wynne Liberals were forced to change the Green Energy Act after it was found to have violated WTO rules. There are countless

bills like this on the books throughout the United States, and this government chose not to act then and is only acting now because the Premier wants to pick a fight ahead of the upcoming election. We've seen a history of these political decisions.

Most recently, it was the whole debate around the minimum wage. I recall, being a former labour critic, when this Premier and this government railed against the idea, when the NDP had it, of hiking the minimum wage overnight to \$15 an hour and said how detrimental it will be to businesses in Ontario and to workers who will lose their jobs. Then, of course, with an election coming in a very short time frame, they decided to hike the minimum wage.

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So it's these sort of political decisions—and I think that's what this is about: picking a trade war with the United States during this critical time in the NAFTA negotiations. I think it's reckless, a last-ditch election ploy to shift the blame for their disastrous economic policies that they have brought in in Ontario.

The Premier has actively participated in lobbying American leaders on the NAFTA negotiations. This bill undermines those efforts. And, Speaker, just a bit of rationale from the government's perspective—we heard during debate about New York passing legislation that will come into effect on April 1 and will mandate that only American-made steel may be procured for certain infrastructure projects. Following a visit to Washington, DC, in recent weeks, the Premier indicated that she will be tabling legislation that will allow the province to respond in kind to New York's legislation and any other state.

Texas, Mr. Speaker, has also passed similar legislation—I believe it was in September of last year—which placed Buy American requirements on the iron and steel in certain construction projects. The Premier has used this legislation as a threat to try and prevent these new laws and has maintained that she will use these measures only in proportional retaliation to other governments.

There has been a lot of media attention around this, and I think this goes to what I said in the opening where this legislation is being used as a political ploy to distract the public from the Liberals' own economic policies.

The first headline that I saw says, “Ontario Liberals Introduce Bill to Retaliate Against Buy American Provisions:

“Ontario's governing Liberals have introduced a bill to retaliate against any state that adopts Buy American provisions as the provincial Legislature resumes sitting for the final session before a spring election.

“Premier Wynne had earlier this month declared her intentions to counter protectionist measures put in place by some US states, saying the bill would be the first piece of legislation passed by her government when the session began.”

It goes on to talk about this being a distraction to the agenda and other issues in the province.

I think our interim leader, Vic Fedeli, said it best in his remarks in the Legislature; I think it was last week. He

said the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario will not support retaliation. “That is the weakest possible response a government can have. It is painfully obvious that this is nothing more than an election ploy by an out-of-touch, out-of-ideas government. This government simply does not understand how business works. This bill makes it painfully obvious.

So what would we do? Why don't we look at real solutions to this. I'm going to give you some examples from 2009, when our leader was mayor of North Bay. “US cities were then restricted from buying Canadian-made goods, while Canada had no such restrictions. I wrote to the mayors of US cities where we made large purchases and reminded them that their city would have had layoffs if it weren't for our purchases....

“Naturally, we prefer to buy Canadian and Ontario goods, but sometimes we simply don't manufacture the products here that we need”—not after 350,000 manufacturing job losses.

“But, because we always want to get the best value for our local taxpayers, we always go for the best price.

“Here's one of those examples. North Bay bought a water filtration system that wasn't made in Ontario. We had to purchase it from Cortland county in upstate New York for \$6 million. Cortland county has 20,000 people. I wrote the mayor and said, ‘Can you imagine if they weren't able to benefit from our purchase?’

“That mayor understood ... and we fought to keep our borders open. In fact mayors from all over the US fought with us to keep our borders open. That's how you stop the Buy American plan. You get your US partners to fight with you. You don't threaten them....”

The Canadian ambassador wrote: “I wanted to send you a short note to commend the letters that you recently sent to your American counterparts about the impact that restrictions to free and open markets can have on jobs in Canada and the United States. Your effort to explain the great success story of the bilateral trade relationship between Canada and the United States and the positive impact it is having on communities is most powerful.

“The issue of Buy American has been a very high priority for the Canadian embassy in Washington. Our work is made all the more effective by efforts such as yours and I hope that other Canadian and American mayors will emulate you and tell the story of interdependence and integration as well as you have.”

Speaker, you need to understand how business works. “Former Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall offered up the best explanation of cross-border supply chains: ‘Saskatchewan farmers buy John Deere tractors made in Iowa, to harvest oats that are then sold to General Mills in Cedar Rapids, turned into Cheerios and exported back to Canada.’

“Former Canadian ambassador to the US Derek Burney further explained, ‘For Americans more generally, we need to demonstrate specifically and statistically how important our trade is to American jobs and interests and emphasize that damage to one partner inevitably damages the other.’

“Auto parts cross borders as many as eight times during the production of a vehicle.... We need time to work with our partners, not to threaten them with fake solutions.” The Premier is threatening to stop this. This government has never understood how business works; this piece of legislation reflects that.

“Something this important cannot be rushed through. This government's knee-jerk reaction is simply to make a political statement. They did not put forward a well-crafted, well-thought-out, meaningful response” to American policies that could impact Ontario. They just made threats.

This is our leader: “We have filed a reasoned amendment to do just what it sounds like—to be reasonable in the amount of time given and to be reasonable in the response. This is too important to get wrong.” I wholeheartedly agree with our interim leader's outlook on this issue.

Another story; I think this one was in the Toronto Star: “Ontario's Retaliation Against Buy American Policies a ‘Last-Ditch Election Ploy’ ...

“Initiating a trade war with the United States is a last-ditch election ploy by (Premier) Kathleen Wynne to deflect the blame for her disastrous economic policies,’ Vic Fedeli, the Progressive Conservatives' interim leader, said.”

Talking about disastrous economic policies, as I said earlier, I had a great meeting today with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, reviewing their Vote Prosperity: The 2018 Election Platform of the OCC—just excellent common-sense solutions to some of the challenges we're having in Ontario, especially just hearing the news a few weeks ago that, in January, we lost, I think it was, 51,000 jobs in the province. It's the single biggest monthly decline in jobs in this province since the great recession of 2009. A number of things were covered in this chamber report: strengthening business competitiveness, fostering job creation, building healthy communities, and improving government accountability.

There are a number of recommendations under strengthening business competitiveness:

“(1) Allow Ontario businesses to purchase surplus electricity at rates equal to or better than the exported price to other jurisdictions.” We all know the story about the decisions that this government has made when it comes to the Green Energy Act, and producing all of this electricity and then dumping it into jurisdictions south of the border.

In fact, in my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, there are two major turbine projects. One is in the works, the North Kent project, where the government is continuing to go ahead to build these turbines even though well water is impacted for 17 families now in that community, again, for electricity that we do not even need. And then there's a second project, with the largest turbines in the country, that the government wants to build near Wallaceburg: the Otter Creek wind project. Again, it makes no sense to continue building more turbines in the province. This is just compounding the issue we have with electricity prices in the province.

And, of course, we have environmental issues and water well safety issues. So that's one suggestion from the chamber.

1730

(2) They suggest that the government should "Conduct and publish the results of a comprehensive review of the electricity sector, including an objective economic impact analysis assessing the full range of inputs that make up the global adjustment ... and then pursue cost-reducing measures based on the results.

"(3) Regardless of public policy approach chosen, pursue efforts to reduce Ontario's greenhouse gas ... emissions in a manner that effectively mitigates risk to business competitiveness.

"(4) Work with federal and local levels of government to establish a publicly available analysis of the cost of doing business ... in Ontario.

"(5) Reinstate scheduled reductions in the corporate income tax, standardize the business education tax and reduce the employer health tax."

Again, on point number (5) on taxation, regardless of what people think is happening south of the border, the fact is that they are reducing corporate taxes, which is going to put pressure on Ontario's competitiveness and on the businesses in this province. They have to make decisions on where they're going to expand. Are they going to expand in Ontario with electricity prices being high when we have a government that's using this legislation we're debating today—I think it's Bill 194—as a political tool to fight with our neighbours? This just isn't good for competitiveness and the decisions that business people have to make.

The second pillar that the chamber highlighted is fostering job creation. They have four recommendations here:

"(1) Modernize the apprenticeship system.

"(2) Redesign Employment Ontario services for both job-seekers and employers and evaluate the potential of an outcomes-based funding model.

"(3) Work with industry and post-secondary institutions to ensure that program offerings remain responsive to the changing labour market dynamics and the regional and sectoral needs of Ontario's business community.

"(4) Allocate resources to focus support on high-growth firms and those with high growth potential, by delaying taxation on corporate income growth to overcome Ontario's scale-up challenge."

Again, I think these are better solutions than picking a fight with our neighbours in the US, which is what we see in Bill 194, this retaliation measure, just to, I guess, distract from the problems that the government has created for many business people.

The third pillar is building healthy communities.

(1) The chamber recommends that the government "Focus on strategic growth policies by ensuring that land use planning and development regulations are aligned, to increase density and create more housing stock.

"(2) Build adaptable and resilient infrastructure stock that can address future pressures including climate change and demographic shifts.

"(3) Develop a single transportation authority in the greater Toronto Hamilton area.

"(4) Strike a health cabinet to improve information-sharing and break down budget silos between ministries.

"(5) Reform the procurement and supply chain processes within the Ontario health care system."

The last pillar, number four, is improving government accountability. Their recommendations are:

"(1) Create a meaningful plan to tackle the debt and move towards balanced or surplus budgets." I would say that that's a very important point and recommendation that the chamber is making because what the government should be focusing on is getting the basics right, and that is to ensure that debt levels are manageable instead of picking a fight with the United States.

"(2) Ensure all proposed policy, regulation and legislation has been evaluated against sound, quantitative evidence.

"(3) Establish criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of strategic goals and publicly publish these targets to ensure transparency.

"(4) Provide appropriate timelines to stakeholders when revising or implementing initiatives that will impact their operations."

On that last point, I would be curious to know of the consultation process that went into Bill 194. Did the the Premier and her economic advisers actually reach out to the business community in Ontario? Do the business people in Ontario want their government picking a fight with the United States during the NAFTA negotiations? It just doesn't make sense to be doing that. We have lost hundreds of thousands of well-paying manufacturing jobs. A lot of the ones that are left in Ontario now are making a decision on whether they stay here or leave. For the government to not speak on their behalf I think is quite concerning.

Another headline regarding this bill, Bill 194: "Ontario Liberals to Bring in Bill Retaliating Against"—essentially against the United States and their Buy American provisions:

"Ontario's governing Liberals are expected to introduce a bill to retaliate against any state that adopts Buy American provisions as the provincial Legislature resumes sitting ... for the final session before a spring election."

I think that says it all, Mr. Speaker: They're bringing this in because this is the final sitting of the Legislature before the spring election. This is a political ploy. It's a diversion tactic. They're not doing what's in the best interests of the economy here in North America. To remind the government, we are in the midst of NAFTA negotiations, and I don't think this is very helpful.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would say that my colleague made a lot of points that deserve a little bit of attention and deserve some answers. He just ended his comments by saying, "Why now?" Why, while NAFTA is still going on—which was supposed to be all done and settled and good to go—with a lot of anxiety surrounding how

those rounds of negotiations will end for workers and families in Canada and Ontario? Why select now?

It looks like the government of Ontario wants to escalate one of those, "I'll poke you in the eye and you poke me in the eye, and then we'll escalate this." Nothing good comes of this. We all know this. We're all grown up. You don't do this. Certainly, the member brought those points forward.

Picking a fight during NAFTA negotiations is never wise. We should, at a bare minimum, show enough respect for the negotiation process that is going on to stay out of it, so that we don't interfere with either side and we make sure that either side gets to play out their strategy for the better of both countries. We all know that at the end of the day successful negotiations mean that both the US and Canada and all of the provinces and territories and the people who live here will benefit, like all of the states and the people who live in the States will benefit. But now we have this piece of legislation that would allow retaliation. Why we would bring this now when NAFTA is still ongoing is beyond me.

I am a New Democrat, and I support workers no matter what they say.

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

Mr. James J. Bradley: I want to say that the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex was an excellent page when he was in the Legislature. I can't say that I approve of his speech, but I want to tell the pages here that he did an outstanding job when he was a page in the Legislature.

I noticed he made lots of references to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. I heard the name Rocco Rossi. It seems to me the last time I heard that name, he was a Conservative candidate in the province of Ontario. Then I heard the name Karl Baldauf mentioned as well, a vice-president. I remember he was very active in the Conservative Party. So I'm wondering whether the chamber of commerce has turned its keys over to the Conservative Party. I don't know that; probably not. I'm probably mistaken there. But those are just two names that came to mind to start off.

What we need here is for this Legislature to stand up for Ontario. I think it has to be unanimous. Why we bring this to a Legislature is to get the all-party approval of a bill of this kind. The member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek I thought made a very good point today when he got up and talked about the challenges that are there, particularly for the steel industry.

You say, why are we doing it now? This is a genuine threat. It is clear that New York state is now going to take action, even though it's less action than it was going to before. So we have to have a statement in this Legislature—a bill—that allows us the opportunity to say, "If you're going to go down this path, we're going to retaliate." If we were not doing this, the opposition would be saying, "Well, you're retreating. You're not doing anything to stand up for Ontario." If we do it, they say, "Well, it's all because of politics."

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I think that this is something that transcends politics, and I was pleased to hear my friend from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek rise above politics in his previous comments today on this kind of legislation.

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

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to continue to debate Bill 194, because we need to have every opportunity possible to demonstrate from other perspectives how Bill 194 is protectionist and it is not what Ontario needs at this time.

There was a former Canadian ambassador to the US, Derek Burney, who further explained, when he had a chance, about the reciprocal relationship of trading partners. He specifically said, "For Americans more generally, we need to demonstrate specifically and statistically how important our trade is to American jobs and interests and emphasize that damage to one partner inevitably damages the other." Truer words couldn't be spoken in this particular case.

In a second, I want to reflect on something that we haven't talked a lot about, the automotive industry, and how reciprocal the automotive industry is between Ontario and US partners. Before I go there, I just want to give a shout-out to a gentleman by the name of Bob Purdy. Bob was a colleague of Dennis, my husband. They both worked at Wescast. Dennis worked in product launch and Bob was a seasoned salesperson on the team who regularly, week in and week out, stayed in the States to promote Wescast products. He was a proud foundry man.

He recently retired. It struck when I was at the retirement party with my husband that he couldn't have been prouder about what they achieved in the heyday of Wescast and the opportunities with manifolds and turbos—the list could go on. He went to the wall to make sure that there were jobs in Wingham and Strathroy, Ontario, which the member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex proudly represents.

The fact of the matter is that we need to think about those people, because auto parts cross the border as many as eight times during the production of one vehicle. We need to ensure that those types of jobs are safe in Ontario.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you to the member from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex for his remarks. As you can see, he's feeling the same sentiments as we are in the NDP—that this is a retaliation bill.

I do want say that I met with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce today. They had a quote here that I read earlier. These are business people who are going to be affected by trade and they are saying to the government, "Positive diplomatic relations should always be our priority when it comes to trade discussions."

With this bill, there's an undercurrent of not doing that. It is retaliatory, right? "If you're going to do this, then we're going to do the same thing." No one is saying that we don't need to have discussions around trade. I think that's important. Again, I voice my concerns: When

there are not details of what you're going to do to reciprocate those actions of someone else—which is, by definition, retaliation—then it is, really, something that we need to debate. We need to understand the powers of the minister. When we look on page 2, they've got very broad power and it's all under regulation.

The framework is here, but the details aren't. We know that we've been through this before. We've been on this hamster wheel. Many times, this government has a framework, there are no details in the bill, and then we're not getting what we debated in this House.

Absolutely, we need to have these discussions. I agree. But let's hear from the government legislators about what's in this bill, what the details are—because there aren't any, Speaker. It's in regulations.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Lambton–Kent–Middlesex can now respond.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: I'd like to thank the member from Nickel Belt, who talked about the NAFTA negotiations and reiterated some of the things I'd mentioned.

My good friend the member from St. Catharines never fails to mention that I was much nicer as a legislative page than I am today. I'm just glad he remembers me from 1991. I certainly remember you.

I'd like to thank my colleague from Huron–Bruce, who talked about this protectionist attitude in measures that the government is taking, and who mentioned Westcast as well. Westcast was a major employer in Strathroy until a few years ago. Hundreds of people lost their jobs. I drive by the former Westcast plant many times during the week, and, of course, it's shuttered, like many other manufacturing facilities across my riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex and across southwestern Ontario.

Also, I thank my colleague, within the NDP, from London–Fanshawe for her remarks on this bill as well.

Coming from southwestern Ontario—these NAFTA negotiations are very important to the families in the communities I represent, and right across southwestern Ontario. The agricultural community is looking at the negotiations. The manufacturers, the small businesses and the medium-sized businesses, I think, to put it mildly, are quite afraid of the actions this government is taking, especially during these negotiations on NAFTA.

I think a lot of us and a lot of people see through it as yet another political decision to distract from some of the initiatives the government has brought forward that have killed jobs and killed businesses in the province of Ontario.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, I will beg your indulgence for a few minutes, because I have heard of Dr. Eric Hoskins leaving his position as Minister of Health as well as MPP for St. Paul.

You will realize that I have been the health critic for the whole time that he has been minister. Starting as health critic, I was critic to George Smitherman. Then came David. Then came the member for London—am I allowed to use her name?—Deb Matthews, and then Dr. Eric Hoskins.

It was very interesting to have someone—the other Ministers of Health that I had the pleasure to work with did not come from the health care system. Dr. Hoskins did, so it was always very interesting to talk to him about health care.

I would say that the best conversations I have had with him and where, in my view, he shined the most were when we were talking about a specific patient, a specific family in need. Then you could see the empathy he has towards helping people. Most health care providers—you go into health care because you want to help people. It was obvious when you would speak to him about a specific client, a specific family, that if he could help, he did.

I know that last week, I talked a lot about a family in my riding. Mrs. Adler is in ALC in the hospital. Her husband is in a long-term-care home. We're trying to reunite them. He was most helpful to make sure that the LHINs and the long-term-care home understood the new regulations that had been put in for couple reunification. He had people in his office call my local LHINs and the local long-term-care office.

As I said, this is one example, but I have worked with him on many, many cases to help resolve something at the local level—sometimes in my riding, sometimes someplace else in our province—and he has always shown a lot of empathy and a lot of caring for people.

I thank you for your indulgence, Speaker.

I will now turn my focus to something completely different, which is Bill 194, the Fairness in Procurement Act.

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Je vais commencer mes remarques en français. Comme j'avais mentionné lorsque j'ai eu la chance, la traduction en français est assez énigmatique. Lorsque l'on parle de « procurement » en anglais, en français en Ontario, on parle d'approvisionnement. Mais dans le projet de loi 194, ils l'ont traduit par « marchés publics ».

Je vous dis que ça fait Google pas mal, cette affaire-là. Ce n'est pas un terme que l'on utilise dans l'Ontario français. Dans l'Ontario français, on parle d'approvisionnement, puis on sait ce qu'on veut dire quand on parle de ça. Je n'ai aucune idée de pourquoi on a cru bon de mettre un titre comme « marchés publics ». Ça fait penser beaucoup plus à « free trade » que ça fait penser à l'approvisionnement. Mais en tout cas, c'est là. Moi, je vous dirais que, du côté francophone, on aurait pu mettre un petit peu plus d'effort, puis ça aurait été meilleur—mais en tout cas.

Le projet de loi concernant l'équité en matière d'approvisionnement—parce que c'est comme ça qu'on aurait dû l'appeler. Premièrement, « la loi prévoit que si, de l'avis du ministre, certaines mesures ont été imposées par des acheteurs provenant d'une autorité législative américaine »—donc, je vais m'arrêter tout de suite là.

Pourquoi est-ce que, ici en Ontario—si on est sérieux qu'on veut parler d'approvisionnement, pourquoi on ne parle que de l'approvisionnement avec nos voisins du sud? Le Canada—on fait affaire avec des centaines de nations à la grandeur de la province. Je ne vois pas pourquoi on a besoin d'une législation spécifiquement pour un pays, soit les États-Unis.

Je peux vous dire que, dans Nickel Belt, on a toutes les mines de nickel du Grand Sudbury. On a des mines pas seulement de nickel, mais de cobalt, de « platinum », de métaux précieux, etc. On fait affaire autant du côté de l'approvisionnement, pour acheter des choses, que ceux à qui on vend à la grandeur de la planète. C'est planétaire.

Donc, ici on a une loi qui dit que, pour ce qui est de l'approvisionnement avec nos voisins du sud, on va avoir des règlements qui vont s'appliquer juste à eux. Si d'autres pays font exactement la même chose qu'un des États des États-Unis, bien là, le projet de loi ne rentre pas en ligne de compte.

Ça, c'est bizarre un peu, parce que—c'est la première ministre qui nous l'a présenté, ce projet de loi-là. Lorsqu'elle s'est levée en Chambre pour nous parler du projet de loi, c'était clair et précis dans sa tête que le projet de loi était là pour protéger les travailleurs et travailleuses de tout l'Ontario. Je suis bien d'accord; je suis néo-démocrate. Je suis bien d'accord de protéger les travailleurs et travailleuses de l'Ontario—bien d'accord avec ça. Mais, de penser que c'est en mettant un projet de loi qui vise juste les États-Unis que l'on va régler les problèmes, je trouve ça un petit peu bizarre—bien, plus qu'un petit peu bizarre, monsieur le Président; je trouve, ça vraiment louche, l'affaire.

Ça dit que si des acheteurs provenant des États-Unis imposent certaines mesures, « le lieutenant-gouverneur en conseil »—donc, le gouvernement au pouvoir—« peut désigner celle-ci comme étant une autorité législative américaine fautive. » Là, on va encore plus loin, dans le sens qu'on va nommer les autorités législatives américaines fautives dans le projet de loi.

En passant, ça ne vous gardera pas réveillé pendant des jours et des jours, lire ça; on parle de deux pages. Donc, dans les deux pages du projet de loi, on explique en long et en large qu'est-ce que c'est qu'une « autorité législative américaine fautive ». Dans un premier temps, il faut que ça vienne des États-Unis. Dans un deuxième temps, il faut qu'elle ait essayé d'acheter des choses d'une façon qui ne nous plaît pas. Mais, peu importe si toutes les autres juridictions de la Terre font la même chose et que ça ne nous plaît pas plus—là, on ne fera rien. On va juste faire quelque chose si c'est aux États-Unis.

« La loi prévoit que la participation de fournisseurs provenant d'autorités législatives américaines fautives »—vous vous souvenez, c'est le mot clé qu'on a présenté dans ce projet de loi—« à des processus d'approvisionnement lancés par des entités gouvernementales ou des entités parapubliques est assujettie à certaines mesures et que chaque aspect de cette exigence est assorti des détails et des règles

supplémentaires énoncés dans les règlements. La loi permet la prise de règlements établissant des processus pour l'obtention d'exemptions de l'application de la loi ou de ses règlements. Les effets des contraventions à la loi ou aux règlements sont également précisés. »

Donc, ça, je vous dirais que c'est un cadre législatif dans le sens qu'on dit, bien, s'il y a un État ou une agence parapublique du gouvernement américain qui dit, « Bon, à partir de maintenant, on va acheter telle chose de telle façon » et que ça ne plaît pas à l'Ontario, l'Ontario peut prendre des mesures contre ça. Mais ça ne dit pas quel genre de mesures, si ce sera de façon proportionnelle ou si ce sera dans le même champ d'action. Ça ne dit rien du tout. C'est juste un cadre législatif, et tout le restant des détails est vraiment laissé au gouvernement du jour à savoir ce qu'on va faire avec ça.

Moi, c'est clair, je n'aime pas ça, des projets de loi qui laissent tout à l'interprétation d'un gouvernement ou qui laissent tout à l'interprétation de règlements futurs. Si tu veux faire quelque chose, bien, mets-le dans le projet de loi; dis-le. Mais là, ça se pourrait bien qu'un État des États-Unis décide de faire quelque chose qui ne nous plaît pas, et l'Ontario va « retalier » contre ça, mais qu'un autre État des États-Unis pourrait faire la même chose, et on ne ferait rien du tout. Il n'y a aucun engagement à ce qu'une action engendre une réaction. On va décider, au cas par cas, s'il y aura réaction. On va décider, au cas par cas, si la réaction sera égale ou si ça va faire escalader les choses, et ça aussi, ça m'inquiète. Je ne vois pas pourquoi on pourrait faire ça.

Le 21 février, la première ministre est venue ici et nous disait : « Il faut protéger les employés et les employeurs, il faut protéger les entreprises et il faut créer de bons emplois. » Moi, je suis partante; je suis bien contente de ça. Je suis toujours heureuse lorsque l'Assemblée législative s'efforce de protéger nos travailleurs et travailleuses, lorsque l'Assemblée législative veut encourager les entreprises, petites, moyennes et grandes, et lorsqu'on veut créer de bons emplois; moi, je suis prenante. Mais il y a bien des façons de faire ça autre que ce qu'on nous présente.

Et là, je vois que vous êtes en train de vous lever, monsieur le Président. Aimeriez-vous que je m'assoie?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): If need be. Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1758.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Bradley, James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
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Cho, Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
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Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	Minister of Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement économique et de la Croissance
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Duguid, Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	
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Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
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French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development / Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Formation professionnelle
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Hon. / L'hon. Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales Minister Responsible for Small Business / Ministre responsable des Petites Entreprises
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MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs Minister Responsible for Accessibility / Ministre responsable de l'Accessibilité
MacLaren, Jack (IND)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Minister of the Status of Women / Ministre de la condition féminine
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Minister of Municipal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires municipales
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Hon. / L'hon. Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
McMahon, Hon. / L'hon. Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	Minister Responsible for Digital Government / Ministre responsable de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Milczyn, Hon. / L'hon. Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of Housing / Ministre du Logement Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research, Innovation and Science / Ministre de la Recherche, de l'Innovation et des Sciences
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	
Naidoo-Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Indira (LIB)	Halton	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care / Ministre responsable de la Petite enfance et de la Garde d'enfants
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Attorney General / Procureur général Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
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Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sandals, Liz (LIB)	Guelph	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	
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, Hon. / L'hon. Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
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	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Vacant	Parkdale–High Park	
Vacant	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Vacant
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Michael Mantha
Granville Anderson, James J. Bradley
Bob Delaney, Catherine Fife
Michael Harris, Monte Kwinter
Michael Mantha, Mario Sergio
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Présidente: Ann Hoggarth
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Han Dong
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Mike Colle, Han Dong
Brad Duguid, Ann Hoggarth
Lisa MacLeod, Cristina Martins
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

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permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Arthur Potts
Yvan Baker, Grant Crack
Lisa Gretzky, Sophie Kiwala
Sam Oosterhoff, Arthur Potts
Lou Rinaldi, Lisa M. Thompson
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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Granville Anderson, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Brad Duguid, Wayne Gates
Sophie Kiwala, Cristina Martins
Sam Oosterhoff, Randy Pettapiece
Shafiq Qadri
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Amrit Mangat
Jim McDonnell, Arthur Potts
Shafiq Qadri, Ross Romano
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Michael Mantha, Deborah Matthews
Monte McNaughton, Laurie Scott
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Bob Delaney, Vic Dhillon
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Randy Hillier, Lisa MacLeod
Liz Sandals
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

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Grant Crack, Joe Dickson
Jennifer K. French, Jack MacLaren
Deborah Matthews, Ted McMeekin
Lou Rinaldi, Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

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