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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 27 November 2018

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 27 novembre 2018

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Let us pray.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

ATTRIBUTION DE TEMPS

Hon. John Yakabuski: I move that, pursuant to standing order 57 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 57, An Act to enact, amend and repeal various statutes, when the bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on second reading may not be deferred pursuant to standing orders 9(c) or 28(h); and

That, at such time, the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on Monday, December 3, 2018, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. for public hearings on the bill; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 57:

—That the deadline for requests to appear be 5 p.m. on Wednesday, November 28, 2018; and

—That the Clerk of the Committee provide a list of all interested presenters to each member of the subcommittee or their designate following the deadline for requests to appear by 7 p.m. on Wednesday, November 28, 2018; and

—That each member of the subcommittee or their designate provide the Clerk of the Committee with a prioritized list of presenters to be scheduled, chosen from the list of all interested presenters received by the Clerk, by 12 p.m. on Thursday, November 29, 2018; and

—That each witness will receive up to five minutes for their presentation, followed by 10 minutes for questions divided equally amongst the recognized parties; and

That the deadline for filing written submissions be 6 p.m. on Monday, December 3, 2018; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 6 p.m. on Monday, December 3, 2018; and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs shall be authorized to meet on Tuesday,

December 4, 2018, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Wednesday, December 5, 2018, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. for clause-by-clause consideration of the bill; and

That on Wednesday, December 5, 2018, at 5:30 p.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the Committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. At this time, the Chair shall allow one 20-minute waiting period pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Thursday, December 6, 2018. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

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

That, notwithstanding standing order 81(c), the bill may be called more than once in the same sessional day; and

That, when the order for third reading of the bill is called, one hour of debate shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill, with 25 minutes allotted to the government, 25 minutes allotted to Her Majesty's loyal opposition, five minutes allotted to the independent Liberal members and five minutes allotted to the independent Green member; and

That, at the end of this time, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and shall put every question necessary to dispose of this stage of the bill without further debate or amendment; and

That the vote on third reading may not be deferred pursuant to standing orders 9(c) or 28(h); and

That, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes.

I have a point of order as well, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Yakabuski has moved government notice of motion number 20. We would look to the minister to lead off debate.

Hon. John Yakabuski: But I have a point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Point of order.

Hon. John Yakabuski: In the first paragraph, I meant to say "pursuant to standing order 47"; I believe I said "57." I'd like to correct the record.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We do require the unanimous consent of the House to change with respect to what the minister indicated. Is there consent to make that change?

I heard a no.

Would the minister care to lead off the debate?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Is the standing order that we quoted in order? It's not correct, so if I could ask how we would correct it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. John Yakabuski: I'm splitting my time with the Minister of Education.

You're going to read the amendment?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Yes, I'll read it.

Hon. John Yakabuski: I'm splitting my time with the Minister of Education.

0910

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm pleased to recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you very much. This is a wonderful example of teamwork this morning, Speaker.

I move that, pursuant to standing order 57 and notwithstanding any other standing order or—no, that's not the one I want? Okay.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The Minister of Education.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I move to amend Bill—government notice of motion number 20 and the first line, "An Act to amend and repeal various statutes." In the first line, replace "57" with "47."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The minister has moved that number "57" be changed to number "47" in the first line.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'll return to the minister, unless you're going to raise a point of order after I recognize the minister.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: So then I go into—

Interjection.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Okay, I don't have to do anything. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate on the amendment? Debate on the amendment? Debate on the amendment.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yeah, we're coming.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member from Timmins.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, that was interesting, I must say. We have to have humour in this place; otherwise, we're all going to go bonkers in this place. Anyway, that was an interesting turn of events.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: It kept it real, Gilles.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: We always keep it real; we always keep it real.

I just have to say, I remember sitting in opposition with the now government that was then the official opposition, and all the honourable members there, most of which are

in cabinet now and others that are not, unfortunately—I'm sure you will get your turn eventually. You will get your turn eventually. They were so solid when it came to speaking against time allocation. The Conservatives used to come into this House, used to rail against the Liberal government and talk about how it is that time allocation was a horrible thing.

My good friend the member from—whatever riding it is—Nipissing. He would get in here and say, "Here we go again, the guillotine," and he would slap his desk. It was all just so much—it was something to watch. I had to think, all kidding aside, that some of it wasn't just acting; some of it was that they actually disagreed with time allocation, because I think as I, and a number of members back then who are now in government, who were in opposition to the Liberals, thought that there may be the odd time where time allocation may be the only way out of a particular situation, but to use time allocation on a regular basis as a means to be able to move the government's agenda forward, quite frankly, is just a situation where the government is incapable of managing its own affairs in the House.

For example, currently the rules without time allocation would allow the government to be able to, first of all, call the bill into the House, introduce it, bring it in so that we can get a first reading, sit down with the opposition, figure out how much time the opposition wants on the bill and what you have to trade in order to be able to move the bill forward. That's the way this place works best.

On a bill like this, on Bill 57, there is no question that the official opposition, the New Democrats under our leader, Andrea Horwath, has a problem with this bill. There are sections of this bill that are quite problematic, and we'll talk about those in a few minutes. But we would have wanted some amendments to the legislation. We would have wanted possibly more hearings on the legislation so that people can come and speak to us.

For example, the francophone community across Ontario sont en rage. Ils regardent ce projet de loi, puis ils regardent l'élimination de l'officier responsable—comme le commissaire aux langues officielles, le commissaire qu'on a présentement, M. Boileau. Ils se disent : « Écoute, comment est-ce qu'un gouvernement qui prétend être en support de la communauté francophone peut éliminer un tel poste? Ça ne fait aucun bon sens. »

Cette position, ce n'est pas quelque chose de dispendieux. Ça coûte à peine une couple de millions de dollars. Ce commissaire est essentiel quand ça vient à s'assurer que le gouvernement provincial et ses agences suivent les mandats qui sont donnés par cette Assemblée et par le cabinet quand ça vient à donner des services en français. Mais plus important, ce commissaire a une opportunité d'être capable d'être proactif quand ça vient aux services des francophones.

Je vais vous donner un petit exemple. Nous autres, à Timmins, on a voulu commencer un projet qui était très important pour notre communauté. Une des affaires qu'on a faites, on était au commissaire, puis on a demandé au commissaire de regarder la question. En effet, il a trouvé que les services pour les francophones—qu'on n'était pas

bien desservis à Timmins quand ça venait à un certain service. Ce commissaire a fait un rapport et ce rapport faisait partie du—comment dire—bilan ou bien du volume d'information qu'on a utilisé, finalement, pour amener ce service à la ville de Timmins.

So, donc, ce commissaire, ce n'est pas quelqu'un qui est là pour prendre des plaintes seulement; c'est quelqu'un qui est là pour être capable d'avancer des dossiers. Dans ce projet de loi, le gouvernement élimine son poste et met quelqu'un au Bureau de l'ombudsman qui va répondre à l'ombudsman et non à l'Assemblée, tel qu'on a fait dans le passé.

So there's a lot of stuff inside this bill that, quite frankly, we don't agree with. The government: Yes, I understand they're a majority and they will get their legislation through the House—rightfully so; that's what they're able to do. But there should be an ability on the part of the government to listen to what the public has to say—in this case, the francophone community when it comes to the commissioner of French-language services; those in the province who are engaged with protecting children when it comes to the child advocate; those who believe in the environment, being the Environmental Commissioner; and a whole host of other issues that you can listen to. Some of the things that this government is doing in this legislation are very problematic, and it ain't saving any money; if anything, it's just going to make things worse.

For example, we just heard yesterday, Mr. Speaker—and you would know, coming from Windsor, how devastating news like this can be—that GM is going to just close their production facility in Oshawa. We know what the story is: The company has decided it wants to change its production line and move into different technologies when it comes to vehicles that we buy in the future—more electric, less gas, more technological when it comes to the features that those cars have.

Well, here we are as a province, we're eliminating the Environmental Commissioner, we've gotten rid of cap-and-trade, we're the only large jurisdiction that doesn't have a plan to deal with how we're going to limit greenhouse gases, and we're supposedly saying to industry, "Come and invest in Ontario." Why would anybody come here and why would GM decide to stake its future in Ontario when you've got a province that's going exactly the opposite way than the company is when it comes to trying to green their product?

That's what this is about, to a degree: General Motors, along with Ford and the rest of them, are trying to move to vehicles that use less fuel. When a government sends a signal such as this government is sending in this bill that it, quite frankly, doesn't believe in climate change and that they want to turn the clock back, well, you're not sending a message to industry out there that this is a jurisdiction that understands that the green economy is where we need to go to.

So I think there are opportunities with GM—

Mr. Randy Hillier: We've been down that road, Gilles.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I know that you don't believe that there's such a thing as climate change, and that's fine,

I respect that you have the right to believe that, but I also have the right to be able to express that I think that's problematic.

As we saw at the turn of the previous centuries, economies always evolve; they go from pre-industrial to industrial. You see the transition that's happened to the economy in Europe, Canada and across the world when it comes to the last 150 years. Nothing remains stagnant, it always moves with time, and that's sort of what's happening with GM.

The government, I think, made two errors: One is to throw in the towel so early after the announcement yesterday. Quite frankly, it just shocked me when I heard the Premier say, "It's done. There's nothing we can do." The second thing is that you're signalling to the world by your actions, by eliminating positions like the Environmental Commissioner and other things that you've done around eliminating cap-and-trade, that Ontario is not a jurisdiction that believes in moving into the green economy. So you say to yourself, "Why did GM pick Ontario?" That's probably one of the reasons, quite frankly.

0920

I think that we could do something about GM if we really tried sitting down and saying, "Let's talk about how we bridge ourselves to your new production plans when it comes to whatever you're going to build," and that GM Oshawa be part of that, because we've invested into that company a fair amount of money to be able to move to those new technologies, we invested in that new centre that was built in Oshawa, and we should be able to get some benefit out of that. I think Ontario, if it so decided, could actually put a fair amount of pressure on the company to do something.

I know, Mr. Speaker, because I was part of a government in the early 1990s where, on a daily basis, because of the recession, we had sawmills closing down. We had paper mills closing down. We had steel plants closing down. We had de Havilland Aircraft talking about shutting down production facilities in Canada. We decided to roll up our sleeves and work with communities and work with industry in order to try to find solutions to the problem and keep those places open, and we succeeded. De Havilland continued on to become Bombardier, which made both the Dash 8 Series 300 and the Dash 8 Series 400, the RJ series, and now moving into this new commuter jet that they're going to be building out of Montreal. Unfortunately, governments after allowed them to be sold to Airbus. Now we've sold off the Ontario division to a western company, which is going to affect jobs here. But we, as a government back in the early 1990s, said, "Listen, we're not taking anything off the table."

The reality is that there is always a possibility of trying to find a solution. If you sit down with the players, be they workers, be they the community, GM and anybody else that is involved in it, we could probably come up with something. But you certainly don't send a good signal by moving in the way that you have, when you're saying you're going to get out of green energy. This government says it wants to move in that direction, and I think it's completely the wrong direction that we have to go.

I want to point out something else in Bill 57 that's actually quite troubling. I'm just going to take a quick look here. I think it's in schedule—let's just find it here. Okay, we find it in schedule 12; that's one place. It's everywhere that we have an officer of the House.

In schedule 12, which is the election officer, there are amendments being made by the government to the legislation that governs how the officers of the Legislature are hired, how they are remunerated and how they're able to appoint a deputy in order to replace them in the case of illness. As we know, that's already happened once with the FAO.

I don't have a big argument with the government trying to standardize the legislation. I think there's maybe some sense to that. But when you look at what they are doing, there's a really, I think, dangerous thing that we're putting in this legislation.

The first part is under section 3 in schedule 12. I just have to find the right section. I'll paraphrase it, because I'm trying to find it as I speak here. That's always a little bit more fun.

Anyway, what it does is it entrenches the process by which we hire officers of the House—that the government in itself cannot hire an officer of the House. There's a process where the recognized parties each sit on a panel. We shortlist, we interview, and we only hire the person we're all in agreement on. In other words, if you're two parties or you're three parties, the two or the three parties—in this case, because we're only two, the New Democrats and the Conservatives—both have to agree on the successful candidate for that person's name to come to this Legislature so that we can enact it when it comes to a vote here in the House. And that's fine. That's the way it should be. That's something that we, as New Democrats, pushed very hard to get some years ago and that the government is seeing their way forward on. Entrenching that in legislation I don't think is a bad thing.

However, the section by which you can get rid of the auditor or get rid of the Ombudsman or any other officer of the Legislature is simply by a vote of this House. This is problematic, because if I'm the auditor and my job is to hold the government to account—if you end up in a confrontation with the government over your doing your job, how much are you thinking that the government might use their majority in order to, essentially, chase you out of office? If you don't like this particular auditor, you don't like this particular Ombudsman or you don't like the Integrity Commissioner, whoever it might be—those people are going to have, over their shoulder all of the time, the thinking that, “The government, if I don't do what they tell me, might fire me,” because it's by a simple majority of the House that they're able to get rid of the person.

We've never operated like that as a practice. It has always been that if there was an issue, we would get together—the recognized parties—to discuss it. We would do the proper HR stuff in order to deal with the issue. But if it ever did come to a decision of having to get rid of somebody, it was only if the parties agreed—the recognized parties of the House, be it two parties or three.

This government is giving itself a majority to fire these people should they want to. I think that's very dangerous, because we know that Mr. Harris—Mr. Harris; that was a Freudian slip. Mr. Harris, I must say, looks more of a socialist than this government, these particular guys, but anyway, that's a whole other story.

Under the Ford government, we know that they're going to have to make some pretty tough decisions, and the auditor, the Ombudsman and others are going to take exception to some of the stuff that this government does. To allow the government to utilize its majority to hold a threat over the officers of the Legislature I think is wrong. We've always operated with the practice here that we do this only when the parties all agree. What the government is doing is stepping out of that by doing what they're doing now. So I just say that this is certainly a problematic situation.

I think the government is going to want to speak to this as well, and I'm sure some of my members want to speak for a bit, so I'm not going to go for very much longer. I just want to end on the child advocate. The child advocate has done a whole lot of really good work when it comes to protecting children. It's not about taking complaints; the job of the child advocate is to be proactive and to work with those people involved in trying to protect children.

I look at what he has done in my part of the world in northern Ontario: a huge initiative when it comes to working with First Nations youth in order to better protect them. He has put in place boots on the ground, as they say, in places like Thunder Bay and other places in northern Ontario so that there's a place that people can go to when they know that young people are at risk. I think that the government getting rid of the child advocate is a really nasty thing to do, because this child advocate has done some great work.

We've had, as you all have in your ridings, issues when it comes to youth with disabilities, either physical or intellectual, who are unable to access a particular service. As a result of that, those children go without the service. We've had the child advocate come to Timmins to meet with agencies, to meet with parents and to meet with community groups, to help us launch strategies so that we're able to deal with better serving the kids in our communities so that they get the kind of supports that they want.

For example, the whole idea of people transitioning out when they were 16 years old and moving out of the system because they turned 16: The child advocate was a large part of making sure that we actually moved the age up to 18 so that those kids, while they were still in school, were not falling out of the system as a result of turning 16.

So I think them moving in order to get rid of the child advocate is just problematic as heck. With that, Mr. Speaker, I would just say that I think my other members would like to say a couple of words, and we'll leave it to them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I actually want to follow up on some of the points that my colleague just made. This idea of having such a large bill with so many issues in it presented to the House and not providing an opportunity for the community to speak to some of the changes—these are

major changes that are going to impact communities across Ontario—is really troubling to me. I'm also going to focus my attention on the provincial advocate, primarily because an advocate does something—their role is very different than the role of an ombudsperson. When I take a look at the details in this bill, I get really nervous.

In my office, I've received a number of calls and concerns about the elimination of the advocate in particular. I know that there are people in my riding who would want to speak to the government about the impact of these changes. By not providing them with sufficient time to bring their concerns to the table, I don't know how we're actually enacting anything that's going to bring back trust in government processes. I think that that's something that we really have to take seriously. If the goal of having the community come out to speak is to, in fact, provide opportunity to build trust etc., then you have to give the community an opportunity to speak to changes that are so vast.

0930

I was actually reading an article from yesterday in the *Globe and Mail*, “Ontario Has Undermined Its Ombudsman's Independence.” At the very, very end—it's quite interesting—the author writes, “Asking an”-ombudsperson—“to take on new responsibilities while installing a trap door underneath them is not in anyone's best interest. If the rationale is to save public funds, well and good—but undermining the independence of oversight is one of the most short-sighted and expensive decisions any Legislature can make.”

I bring that up because that, I think, is a sentiment that's shared by many people who are in my riding, and likely in ridings across Ontario. The idea of taking away an advocate is problematic on its own, because somebody who's an advocate is actually fighting for changes to the system; somebody who's an ombudsperson generally takes complaints. Those are two very distinct operations, so combining the two is problematic on its own.

Then, to have a clause within this bill that suggests that if the government or the House feels that a decision made by the ombudsperson is incorrect or wrong-headed, we can vote and have them suspended, is really troubling. How are they supposed to do their job independently? How are they supposed to do their job in good conscience if, hanging over their head, as my colleague had just said, is the possibility of them losing their job? That, to me, is an indication that there is no desire for oversight.

That brings me right back to the beginning: If we do not provide sufficient time for people across the province to come in, to write about their concerns, then there seems to be a lack of desire to hear from the people about issues that are going to arise with these changes. Something like an advocate—if we mess that up, that's people's lives. That's the lives of children that are going to be lost if we don't make sure that there is somebody who they can speak to who can advocate for change. I think there is insufficient amount of time for us to keep reiterating that point, in my opinion. This is a huge, huge, huge challenge.

With that being said, I'm quite nervous about the fact that so little time will be allocated to people being able to speak

to some of these changes. I think all three of the independent positions that have been eliminated in this bill are things that everybody in the province worked really hard to have, to have that kind of independent oversight. I don't think that strong leadership should be so worried about people being critical about what it is that they're doing.

That's kind of my final point, really: Strong leadership should have no worries about sitting and talking to people across Ontario about the changes that they want to make. They should be open to having people across Ontario provide them with criticism, suggestions, concerns, and they should be willing to speak to those concerns. If everything in this bill is being suggested for something positive and good, then there should be no problem with somebody asking questions, but there seems to be resistance to anybody asking the government questions. That piece is very scary.

Then, when you take the next step and start to take away advocacy roles, roles that independent folks—their job is just to take a look at what is happening here. It's not just for this government; that's for the future of all governments when they make this change. That means that we're actually setting ourselves up, then, across Ontario to have to advocate again to get these positions back. It doesn't make any kind of sense.

If it does make sense, then why can't we just have time to have that discussion? Instead of decreasing the amount of time that we have to debate these ideas, why can't we actually debate the ideas? Why can't we open it up and have people send in their thoughts and their feelings and engage in that kind of discussion? Why can't we make sure that people can actually get here to have sufficient time not just to look through—it's quite a hefty bill of changes. We have to give Ontarians enough time to read through it, to think about the impact, to get over the shock of the changes that are happening so quickly, and then to get here.

I think that this seems to be an ongoing refrain: that we don't give enough time. It seems, on the surface, that we're providing some amount of time for the public to come and engage, but in actuality, how are people supposed to get here with such short notice? How are they supposed to navigate the changes that are happening?

I think that the criticism is already all through the media. The media has already picked up on some of the changes that are happening here, and that's at least one step. But there seems to be resistance to criticism, and that's worrisome to me. And this is just the start. This is a pretty hefty set of changes, and I'm quite nervous about that.

Kevin, I'm not sure how much time—sorry. I just had to check in with my team.

Interjection.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Yes? Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. Further debate?

Government members: There are four different conversations—if you can keep it down. I'm having to wear my earpiece so that I can keep up with what is being said on this side.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Is this just ever since I walked over to this side?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Well, you've been very loud since you've joined the little group there, Minister.

Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased, I think, to rise to speak in opposition to the time allocation that is before us today. The reason I hesitated, Speaker, is because it is always a shame, quite honestly, to have to participate in a debate about closing off debate.

This is a very thick piece of legislation that we have before us in Bill 57. There are 45 schedules. There are multiple pieces of existing legislation that are amended by this bill. To date, we have allocated six and a half hours of debate for these 45 schedules of this very thick omnibus bill. If you do the math, that works out to be about eight or nine minutes per schedule, in total. That's eight or nine minutes for every member who has something to say about each of those 45 schedules to do the due diligence, to bring the concerns of our constituents to the floor of this House so we can make good decisions about the legislation that we are bringing forward for this province.

Today I want to share a couple of those voices that we should be hearing from—people that I represent in London West. First, I want to talk about a young woman named Elsbeth Dodman. Elsbeth is an inspiring advocate. She is a young woman with autism. She has been very outspoken about the challenges that she has faced because of her autism: the underemployment that she continually experiences and the barriers that she has encountered. One of the things that she was able to do to empower her voice, to amplify her voice across the province, was to be involved with the advocate for children and youth office and the We Have Something to Say project.

She sent me an email, and she said that the decision that is in this bill to eliminate the child advocate is heartbreaking. She said, "This is heartbreaking for myself and my colleagues who have worked through the office on various projects. I've been in touch with some of them through social media and we are all upset, shocked and confused—especially at the prospect of what comes next.

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"The Ombudsman's office does not have the time to direct its full attention to the work the advocate's office was doing.

"I've been calling whoever I can, reaching out to whoever I can. The office and the people there and the work we were doing means so much to me. I cannot sit and watch Ontario, the very first province to have an independent child advocate, be the first to lose it. And all in the name of a budget."

In her email to me, she attached a photo of herself and others who were involved with the We Have Something to Say project, which was initiated by the child advocate's office. She says, "I wish Doug Ford could see this photo and see the faces of the people he's saying no to."

Now, Speaker, those of us who have been in this place for some time will be aware that in 2014 the We Have

Something to Say project was started by the advocate as an attempt to begin to close the gap between provincial policy and the realities facing children and youth with disabilities in this province, and their families and caregivers. It put the voices of young people with disabilities right at the centre of these policy discussions and the development of recommendations, to ensure that their rights were respected.

We have no way of knowing whether the new Ombudsman that's going to take over the role of the provincial advocate—whether that office will be able to continue the We Have Something to Say project. The loss of that project, as Elsbeth Dodman says, is going to be devastating for those young people who have been involved.

The other voice from my constituency that I wanted to share is from a constituent named Lee Richardson Symmes. She forwarded me an email that she sent to the Premier about the elimination of the Environmental Commissioner. She says, "Whether it be ignorance or guile on the part of his government, I think this move paves the way for some bad policies and actions by the Ford government, and I hope the NDP will highlight this issue."

She says, "I was shocked and dismayed to learn that your government is eliminating the Office of the Environmental Commissioner. This action is the environmental equivalent of eliminating the province's auditor, an essential non-partisan assessment for the public of any government's stewardship and a valuable source of constructive suggestions. This is a serious mistake and the optics are terrible.

"No one familiar with environmental conditions or issues will believe that the financial analysts in the auditor's office have the skills or interest to perform this function with credibility.

"The cost of the" Environmental Commissioner of Ontario "is trivial within the Ontario scheme of things so the contribution to deficit reduction or tax cuts will be lost in rounding the numbers.

"Many people will conclude the real reason is that your government is poised to adopt a number of actions and policies that will be backward and detrimental to the quality of air we breathe, the nature we love and the environment which is essential to our quality of life."

Speaker, I think that my constituent Lee Richardson Symmes has really hit the nail on the head here. We know that the Environmental Commission was highly critical of the very first actions that were taken by this government to cancel cap-and-trade without any kind of alternative plan in place. The Environmental Commissioner has been outspoken about the negative impact of the actions that have been taken by this government on protecting our climate, on preserving our climate for future generations, on ensuring the quality of the air that we breathe and the water we drink. It's pretty clear that this government's decision to eliminate that position was basically a preemptive strike, because they know what's to come and they didn't want to face that criticism from the Environmental Commissioner about the policy decisions that they were making.

The third thing that I wanted to highlight is the elimination of the French Language Services Commissioner. In my community of London, there are 7,000 students who are enrolled in French immersion schools throughout our community. There are 2,800 students who are enrolled in French-language schools. That's almost 10,000 students who were looking forward to the French-language university, whose language rights had been protected because of the office of French Language Services Commissioner. These are all young people and families who will be affected by this government's decision to eliminate that position, which is also a part of this budget bill.

These decisions have an impact. They have a very profound ripple effect throughout many of our communities across this province.

The final point that I wanted to speak to in one of the other 45 schedules of this bill—one of those schedules talks about rent control. It allows dwellings that are built after 2018 to no longer be subject to rent control legislation.

This morning, I met with realtors from my community, realtors from London, who pointed out that in the last three years in London, there has been a 50% increase in the average home sale price. What that does for entry-level buyers, for young people who are looking to get their first home, is it forces people to remain in rental buildings. By allowing these new rules, allowing builders to build new rental units and to be able to raise the rent however much they want—do you think that's going to incentivize builders to build affordable housing, to build affordable homes? No. It's going to incentivize the development of more high-end rental dwellings where the rent can be raised wherever the developer decides or the landlord decides. This is not going to do anything to address the housing crisis in my community.

We know that it's not just our social housing stock that is in crisis; there is a crisis of affordability across the board. In my community in London, we have the London Poverty Research Centre that's doing amazing work to highlight the reality of the precarious labour market. Some 50% of people who are working in London are employed in unstable jobs that provide no security and no benefits. Half of our workforce who are working are in precarious jobs. They can't afford to buy a new home when there has been a 50% increase in the price of a new home over three years, and they are unlikely to be able to manage rental units where the landlord is now exempt from rent control if there are new rental units that come onto the market.

There are so many things to address in this bill. I've highlighted, certainly, the loss of the independent, non-partisan watchdogs of this Legislature: the Environmental Commissioner, the child and youth advocate and the French Language Services Commissioner. The loss of those positions is going to be very detrimental to our ability to provide the kind of oversight that people expect from government.

There has been an erosion of trust in terms of people's trust that government has their best interests at heart. It's no wonder when we watch, particularly with this government, the decisions that have been made. To have these

independent, non-partisan officers providing that third-party, neutral level of oversight is absolutely essential. This government has no interest in transparency despite the title of this bill.

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If they were interested in transparency, they would keep those officers in place, because those officers shine the light on some of the systemic problems that people in this province are facing. They challenge the government to take action on those issues, they push the government, they push all of us, to acknowledge and recognize and act on these concerns. To have those voices silenced is going to be devastating. It's irresponsible.

I'm going to conclude now. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: In this bill there are a multitude of wonderful, beneficial improvements for the province, but I do want to draw this House's attention and the committee's attention to three elements that I think require further examination in committee.

The first one is in response to the member from Timmins' comments. The mechanism to suspend an independent officer of the House, in my view, requires a more robust and stronger check and balance on that function of a suspension. I would like to draw that attention to the committee.

The second element I'd like to bring attention to is the changes to the Civil Remedies Act; I believe that's schedule 6. This amendment facilitates and broadens, in my view, the ability for the state to seize people's private property without due process, so I would like to draw that element to the committee's attention when it's examined.

Finally, I believe it's schedule 16, the Election Finances Act: We spent a lot of time on that bill, creating it, and the mechanism to repeal the need for the public declaration of funds. I know it's a complicated process, it has caused a lot of inconvenience and it was a lot of difficulty to get it done; however, removing it without another suitable mechanism to ensure that personal funds are the ones being used, I think, needs to be strengthened up.

So I would draw the committee's and the House's attention to those three elements when the bill is examined further.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 57; in particular, the time allocation motion of it. There are a number of elements to the legislation, and one in particular has to do with after 15 years of Liberal mismanagement. The government is working hard to reduce the province's \$347-billion debt while making life more affordable for all individuals, families and businesses. We're determined—absolutely determined—to meet this challenge by using the 2018 fall economic statement as a solution to monitor public spending, while also creating profitable growth strategies for the province.

You will know, Speaker, that making responsible decisions around budgeting, living within your means and saving can change your life. It can absolutely change your life. Those same healthy habits around personal spending I believe also apply to public spending. Ontario's interest payments on the debt are now the fourth-largest line item

on the provincial budget. That means taxpayers are spending approximately \$1.4 million on interest every hour—every hour, Speaker: a significant cost that’s unfair, and it’s unsustainable.

Since being elected in June, we’ve taken action to modernize government. Small steps and keystone habits lead to impactful change, and we’re already seeing the results. We’ve given families and businesses important tax relief by not proceeding with the previous government’s \$308 million in planned tax increases, and cancelling the cap-and-trade carbon tax in order to strengthen Ontario’s economy. These measures would keep almost \$2.7 billion in the pockets of people and businesses in our great province.

Speaker, knowing how to manage money isn’t enough. You’ll know this, and many other MPPs in this chamber know that. Like families, the government cannot indefinitely spend more than it takes in. We must lead by example and make smart financial decisions on behalf of the people we have the privilege of serving.

We were elected to not just fulfill a balance-sheet commitment, but to also ensure that the vital programs that people rely on meet their needs. Ontario residents may not notice the numbers on the province’s statements; however, they feel the impact—they absolutely feel the impact—that mismanaged finances can have on their everyday lives. By making responsible financial decisions around public spending, as we are, we can take care of those who are most vulnerable and need our compassion the most.

Prior to the release of the Independent Financial Commission of Inquiry’s report in mid-September of this year, the Auditor General had reviewed the Liberal’s Pre-Election Report on Ontario’s Finances. In that report, the Auditor General framed the Liberal behaviour with words—and these are her words—like “conceal,” “bogus,” “unreliable” and “deceptive.”

Once again, those are the descriptors of the Auditor General of Ontario. As you know, Speaker, this language is not normally used to describe a government’s accounting—far from it. What it revealed was a reckless spree of deficit-financed spending that, in turn, led to a carefully conceived series of accounting tricks, all intended to obscure the resulting costs from the public.

This is the context for the introduction of Bill 57. It will, if the proposed legislation is passed, restore the trust, accountability and transparency to Ontario’s finances. At the same time, it will make life more affordable for all Ontarians.

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce had this to say about Bill 57: “We are pleased to see the government of Ontario taking reasonable steps to build a more prosperous Ontario with a strong focus on fiscal accountability and cutting cumulative red tape. On behalf of our 60,000 members in 135 communities across the province, we have long called on the government to reform Ontario’s tax system, reduce red tape, and restore fiscal sustainability to the Ontario taxpayer.

“We agree with the decision that the government of Ontario will not proceed with the prior government’s initiative that would have taxed the so-called ‘passive’ income

for thousands of businesses across” Ontario. “This would have greatly increased taxes for thousands of employers in Ontario.”

Finally, “Our members are also supportive of some of the government’s other key priorities, such as their commitment to:

“—expanding broadband to rural and underserved communities across Ontario;

“—reviewing electricity costs for industrial users; and

“—investing in both the Ring of Fire and transportation infrastructure in northern Ontario.

“Combined, these are fundamental steps towards a more competitive and prosperous economy.”

Let’s turn now to some of the other elements in Bill 57 that are important to this discussion that we’re having this morning and earlier debate a few days ago. First, the legislation introduces one of the most generous tax cuts for low-income workers in a generation. It’s called the LIFT, or Low-income Individuals and Families Tax Credit. It would provide low-income and minimum wage workers up to \$850 in Ontario personal income tax relief and couples up to \$1,700. The vast majority of people earning \$30,000 per year or less will pay no personal income taxes whatsoever when they file their 2019 tax returns. Low-income taxpayers earning just over \$30,000 will also receive graduated relief.

1000

Ontario’s government for the people is committed to helping taxpayers keep more of their hard-earned money. Every single dollar of this credit is targeted to low-income workers. If the bill is passed, Speaker, this measure will provide tax relief to 1.1 million people in our province.

I’d like to turn now to housing. Housing is another long-standing issue addressed by the proposed legislation. The demand for housing in Ontario has risen rapidly in recent years, driven by strong population growth and low interest rates. However, the supply of housing has not kept pace, leading to higher prices and rents—that’s a truism. As part of the new Housing Supply Action Plan, the government is developing a strategy to increase housing supply quickly and responsibly so that more good-quality places to live will be available for the hard-working people of Ontario.

With respect to making rent more affordable and promoting housing development, the government is proposing to encourage developers to build more rental housing by exempting new rental units from rent control, but at the same time keeping its promise to preserve rent control for existing tenants and cancelling the expensive and ineffective Development Charges Rebate Program, which will create savings of approximately \$100 million over four years. Critics may expound at length about exposing new tenants to higher rents, but experts in the industry will tell us that a limited housing supply does much more damage. Limits on rent increases have ultimately discouraged developers from constructing rental units, and this bill, Bill 57, if passed, will encourage the construction of new rental units and take away one of the key impairments to growth.

We are a government for the people, not just those who live in the cities or in the southern part of the province. The Minister of Finance has long been a special champion for northern Ontario, and with the support of all of his caucus colleagues, many of whom are here this morning, he does not ignore its residents.

First and foremost, working directly with First Nations partners, the government will end the delays for the development of the Ring of Fire and will promote resource revenue sharing agreements between First Nations and northern communities, as well as mining and forestry companies, so that the benefits of northern development will be shared.

In addition to those northern Ontario initiatives I already highlighted, the government is expanding natural gas delivery to over 70 communities and 30,000 households, it is investing in broadband infrastructure so that all of Ontario may participate in the digital economy, and a special working group is being created to speed up regulatory approvals and attract new investments in the mining industry. Northern Ontario is Ontario, and our purpose is to ensure that any legislation is sensitive to northern issues and deals with residents fairly and equitably.

Finally, another feature of Bill 57 is making Ontario better for the people. In that respect, the government is working to cut hospital wait times and end hallway health care for patients. The government is investing \$1.9 billion in mental health and addiction services over the next decade, matching the federal government's commitment. We will be investing an additional \$90 million in 2018-19 to build 1,100 beds and spaces in hospitals and the community, including over 640 new beds and spaces to prepare for the flu season, and investing more than \$300 million to support the addition of 6,000 new long-term-care beds, the first wave of more than 15,000 new long-term-care beds over the next five years.

Households struggle and work every day to manage their finances and to live within their means. Surely they should be able to expect their elected officials to do the same with their tax dollars, managing and accounting for every penny. That's what we're doing: managing dollars for them as we must do every month with our own family budgets. That expectation is both reasonable and, with critical focus, attainable. It is absolutely attainable.

The overriding direction of Bill 57 is one that creates a process for reasonable and pragmatic change. It carves a path through some very deep undergrowth. The Minister of Finance has told all of us that there are no quick fixes, and there aren't. A path back to balance is a difficult one, an absolutely difficult one. It will require fiscal discipline, but it will also require innovation and creativity, transparency and accountability. We owe both those things to the taxpayers we are representing, and we're delivering. Bill 57 does not raise taxes. It makes life more affordable for people and safeguards vital public services and programs they rely on every day.

The bottom line is this: We have a rare chance to transform public finances, and it's one that we cannot squander. We will continue to put Ontario's fiscal house in order and

focus on serving this province through transforming the culture of government. If done right, we'll see a more sustainable Ontario for current and future generations: your children and your grandchildren, Speaker; everyone's children and grandchildren.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): A point of order from the member from Timmins.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would be remiss if I did not introduce Colleen Landers from the English Catholic board, who is here all the way from Timmins. Welcome to our Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): That is not exactly a point of order, but it's always nice to welcome our guests.

The member for Markham–Stouffville.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise briefly today to speak to the motion that was brought forward.

Principally, the motion was brought forward so we can begin to deal more effectively with the economic crisis that has befallen our province. We have to go back in order to understand where we are today, and I appreciated the fact that the member for Timmins did a little bit of that, Mr. Speaker, but you will appreciate that this government has absolutely no intention of following the path of the previous NDP government. It was a government many, many years ago, but it's a government that Ontarians are still paying for today. Obviously, we have no intention of doing that. We have no intention of having record-setting deficits; we have no intention of raising taxes; we have no intention of building an economy where few can prosper and where the only people who benefit are our neighbours to the south, because that's where our jobs go to.

The last 15 years in this province followed much the same path of the previous NDP government, but elevated to a whole different stratosphere. We came off a time where we have a deficit now, this government is faced with a deficit, of some \$15 billion. Now, I know that's a very large number and it's hard for a lot of people to contemplate, but \$15 billion means that we're paying, as the member for Whitby had mentioned, about \$1.4 million an hour more than we take in. One of our largest budget items is interest on the debt, and that's just obviously unsustainable. It's unsustainable.

We obviously know we have an aging population. We have to do more with health care; we have to do more with long-term care. It's hard to do that when your third-largest budget item is interest. It's hard to pay for transit improvements and infrastructure improvements when you're paying so much for interest. It can't be done.

1010

The people of Ontario rightfully, before the last election, were very clear: They had had enough. They wanted the province of Ontario to move in a very different direction. All of us went to the people and we heard what the people said. They said, "Get your house in order. Get our house in order." Because it's not the government's house;

it's not our house; it's the people's house. When we go door to door and we hear from them, and they talk about how hard it has been for them to make ends meet, they're not making stories up. When I'm in my riding of Markham—Stouffville—by and large, Stats Canada will tell you, it's a very wealthy riding. We've done very well in a lot of areas. But when you go door to door, you hear from person after person, from family after family, that they're having a very difficult time making ends meet. And that's in an economy with low interest rates. We know things are starting to change. When communities are asking for more and families are taking in less, then obviously we have a problem.

Since I've been here in debate, I've heard consistently from members from both sides—from our side and from that side—of the need to invest in transit and infrastructure. In my community, that's had a devastating impact. The inability of the previous government in the city of Toronto to make decisions on transit and infrastructure has left billions of dollars stranded, sitting in a bank account unused, for over 10 years. That's unacceptable. People in the eastern part of my riding—in Markham, in particular—shouldn't have to struggle to get on public transportation. It irritates them. It frustrates them and gets them angry when they find out that \$5 billion has been sitting there in an account unused—\$5 billion. What does that mean for the people in my part of Ontario? It means that the people of Markham could have had access to a subway or a rapid transit along Sheppard Avenue, but because the city of Toronto couldn't make a decision, the money sits there. That's unacceptable. We need transit and infrastructure in my riding. The money is there. It needs to be used so that we can grow the economy. So the investments that the people have already made need to be used.

I know that many of us will be meeting with trustees today. We have issues with respect to schools. Some schools in my riding—it's a fast-growing riding, a fast-growing community—need to have infrastructure improvements. You can't do that when you're spending more on interest to pay for a deficit that we've all accumulated than you can set aside for reconstruction and repairs of schools. You can't do that.

Mr. Speaker, this motion is all about bringing together a plan. This is a very first step—it's a first step. Yes, we've reduced the deficit by \$500 million, from \$15 billion to \$14.5 billion. That's a good first step, but it's the first step in a plan, the plan that this government is bringing forward to unleash the potential of the Ontario economy, to prepare it for what might lie ahead; for changes in the economy, as our economy moves in a different direction; preparing us to meet head on some of the challenges that we saw yesterday with respect to Oshawa. That's what this is: It's a first step.

So I would implore my colleagues opposite to work with us. We're going to have differences of agreement, obviously, on how we move this economy forward, but work with us. Help us reduce taxes. Help us invest in people. Help us pay down the debt, because balancing the budget isn't enough. We have to bring forward a plan to also pay down some of this debt. So I would ask my colleagues opposite to join with us, support us and help us move forward

on balancing the budget and investing in individuals and families.

Mr. Speaker, it's also a good time to recognize the fact that what the finance minister has done is really started reinvesting in people. What do I mean by that? Some of our lowest-income individuals—when I went door to door and I talked to people; I know many of us have heard this—a lot of them could not understand why it is that some of the lowest-income earners are sending money to the government. It makes no sense. This budget changes that.

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is starting to bring forward a plan to invest in long-term care for our communities. You can't address hallway health care if you don't make investments in long-term care, but for far too long that wasn't done. The Liberal government didn't do it. The previous NDP government, many years back, closed hospital beds. That wasn't—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Don't take this as a partisan interruption, but we have reached that point of the morning where further debate is going to terminate at this point.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We are going to recess until question period at 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Before I ask the members to introduce their guests, I would like to draw attention to the fact that in the Speaker's gallery today there are realtors from my riding of Wellington—Halton Hills and adjacent communities: Katrina Steffler, Denise Dilbey, Brett Nodwell and Karen Keleher. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: As the minister responsible for women's issues, I'd like to welcome the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario and 23 of its members, who are here today for their 95th semi-annual meeting, including Edeltraud Neal, president of the organization. It was first established in 1923. I want to welcome them here today.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to recognize those travelling from the city of Ottawa who are here today from the Ontario Real Estate Association: Jennifer Morley and John Bennett are in the gallery.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would first of all like to welcome Michel Blais, Tiffany Rogers and Anne Marie Vaillancourt, our realtors who come from the city of Timmins. I remind you to meet us out front afterwards; we'll go for lunch.

Also, this is a two-for-one sale because we have Colleen Landers, who is here with the English Catholic board, but she's also here with the Catholic women. We welcome you all to Queen's Park.

Mme Nathalie Des Rosiers: I would like to welcome John Bennett from Ottawa, who is here with us today. I had the pleasure to meet him this morning

Ms. Jane McKenna: I would like to welcome two of my constituents whom I had meetings with this morning, Sean Morrison, the chair of government relations for OREA, and Tamer Fahmi. Tamer and his beautiful bride, Janet, who isn't here today, are very good friends of mine in Burlington. Thank you for the meeting this morning and for being here today.

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I want to welcome Nordiah Newell to the Legislature today. Nordiah is majoring in political science and French at the University of Western Ontario. She volunteers in her community, mentoring women of colour who are interested in politics. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Bill Walker: I would like to introduce OREA's president-elect, Karen Cox, her husband, Russ Severnuk, and Stan Reljic, Gail McCartney, Julie Marshall, William Ballard and David Reid—all from the great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound—CEO Tim Hudak, and all the realtors in the building.

From the Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board, board chair and chair of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association, Bev Eckensweiler, and student trustee, Mackenzie Finamore.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I would like to welcome local Thunder Bay realtor Bob Pfaff, from the Ontario Real Estate Association, to the House this morning.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: It is my pleasure to introduce members of the Mississauga Real Estate Board who are present here this morning: Tehreem Kamal, Ray Dubash, Helen Goljack and Ettore Cardarelli. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I met with a whole gang of realtors from the Windsor and Essex county real estate association, and they're here today: Tina Roy, Daniel Hofgartner, Krista Del Gatto, Lorraine Clark, Bob Pedler, Anna Voza and Phil Dorner. Thank you for coming to Queen's Park. You are very welcome.

Mr. Norman Miller: I would like to welcome, from Parry Sound, Scott Broad, who is here with the Ontario Real Estate Association, and as well his son, Liam Broad, who has got a keen interest in politics and helped me out in the election campaign. Thank you, and welcome to Queen's Park.

Miss Monique Taylor: I also had the pleasure of meeting with some folks from OREA this morning from Hamilton: Jack Loft, Wendy Stewart and Nicolas von Bredow. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Miss Kinga Surma: I would like to welcome and introduce Kevin Krigger, who is a part of the realtors' association and is also my constituent. Welcome to the House.

Hon. Rod Phillips: I'd like to welcome the grade 10 class from Archbishop Denis O'Connor Catholic High School and their teacher, Mike Orsag. It's a civics class and it's their first visit to Queen's Park. Welcome.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: It's a pleasure today to rise and also add my welcome to Beverley Eckensweiler from Mildmay, Ontario, in Bruce county. She is serving as chair of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, and she is joined as well by Nick Milanetti.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: I'd like to introduce His Eminence Cardinal Collins, who is with us today, proudly representing Toronto's archdiocese. It is always a pleasure to be with you in your presence. Thank you for your guidance, Your Eminence.

Mr. Dave Smith: I had the pleasure this morning of meeting with three real estate agents from my riding, Kristi Doyle, Christine Ball and Cathy Burningham, welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I also wish to introduce to the Legislature today those who are here today with Cardinal Collins and the friends of Catholic education who are in the members' gallery. I look forward to joining you for lunch. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's my privilege to introduce members from the Chatham-Kent real estate board: president Steve Carroll, president-elect Michael Gibbons, executive officer Janice Wieringa and chair of political affairs Amber Pinsonneault.

Ms. Marit Stiles: It gives me great pleasure to welcome the many Friends and Advocates for Catholic Education who are joining us here today, including, as others have mentioned, His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Collins; Beverley Eckensweiler, president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association; and Liz Stuart, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association; as well as many trustees and other representatives. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I would like to welcome this morning Danny Tedesco-Derouchie from the Cornwall real estate board, along with Lyle Warden, who is also the deputy mayor-elect for South Glengarry. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Doly Begum: It's my pleasure to introduce Regent Heights Public School to Queen's Park today. I'm very happy to have Regent Heights students here—the first batch.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Hon. John Yakubuski: When I didn't stand up, I got recognized. I appreciate that. I would also like to bring greetings from the House to His Eminence Cardinal Collins and all of the advocates for Catholic education here today.

In addition, I would like to welcome one of my Ontario Real Estate Association members from Renfrew county, Cindy Sell.

Mr. David Piccini: I just wanted to welcome to the House Wendy Giroux, a constituent from Port Hope who is also head of the Durham Region Association of Realtors and who is here with us today. We had a great meeting this morning. Welcome to the Legislature.

Ms. Jill Dunlop: I would like to welcome constituents of mine from the Lakelands realtors: Debbie Gilbert, Mike Stahls, William Ballard, Debbie Vernon, Crystal Henderson and Kelly Warr.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park this morning realtors from the London and St. Thomas area realtors, otherwise known as LSTAR: Jeff Nethercott, Earl

Taylor, Jim Smith, Chad Lovell and John Geha. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: Good morning. I'll take the chance as well to welcome His Eminence Cardinal Thomas Collins, and I would like to mention and thank the Catholic church for their support of the persecuted minorities in the Middle East.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, I would like to introduce, from the Woodstock-Ingersoll Real Estate Board, William Cattle, Isaak Friesen and Linda Van Hooren; and from the Huron Perth Association of Realtors, Gwen Kirkpatrick and Sue Fowler.

1040

Mr. Ross Romano: I'd like to welcome to the House this morning from my riding of Sault Ste. Marie members of the Sault Ste. Marie Real Estate Board: Tiffany Rogers and Jodie McNabb.

Mr. Stephen Crawford: I would like to welcome the grade 5 class from a school in my neighbourhood, New Central school in Oakville.

Hon. Laurie Scott: From Lindsay, with the Ontario Real Estate Association, we have Jim Sexsmith. Thank you very much for being here this morning.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I, too, would like to welcome a former member to the assembly today: Tim Hudak. Welcome back to the Ontario Legislature.

It is now time for oral questions.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, on behalf of the New Democrats, I would also like to welcome His Eminence Cardinal Collins to the Legislature and all those folks who are here advocating for Catholic education.

My first question is to the Acting Premier. Yesterday, families in Oshawa received devastating news about GM's plans to shut down operations. Speaking on behalf of Conservatives in Ottawa, Andrew Scheer said, "Conservatives aren't prepared to throw in the towel on this." Can the Acting Premier explain why Conservatives in Queen's Park are ready to do exactly that?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks very much for the question this morning. It has been a difficult 48 hours for the folks in Oshawa and in the Durham region. There's no question about that. This news hit hard.

That's why Premier Ford, Ministers Bethlenfalvy and Phillips and a number of other members from the Durham region went to Oshawa last night to meet with the outgoing mayor, John Henry; the incoming mayor, Dan Carter; and members of the chamber of commerce to talk about how we can provide supports, as the province of Ontario, for that

region, which is being hit so hard in a global restructuring that—and I have to reiterate this: It's a global restructuring.

When asked by the Premier if we could do anything to keep that Oshawa facility up and running—on numerous occasions, we asked the question. General Motors has answered that the decisions are final and, unfortunately, those lines will be moving out of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: For thousands of families in Oshawa, losing GM means losing their livelihood, and they're not willing to give that up without a fight. But the Premier's message to them yesterday was, "It's over. It's done. That ship has sailed." How can the government declare that the fight for jobs is over when they threw in the towel before it had even began?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks again for the question.

We've been on the ground in Oshawa. We met with the mayors and the regional council, the soon-to-be chair of the regional council and members of the chamber of commerce to talk about next steps so that we can continue to make Ontario open for business, so that we can ensure that the Durham region reaps the rewards of the changes that we're making in Ontario so we can bring good-paying jobs to the Durham region.

There are a lot of different things that we're going to be exploring as the new government to ensure that the people of Oshawa, that the people of Durham land on their feet; that we see new investment in those employment lands and employment lands along the 400 series of highways.

Oshawa is in a great position to see a brand new investment in that community—great jobs that are going to support the families in the Durham region. Working together with the leadership in Durham region, working with the chamber of commerce, Nancy Shaw and her team, we're going to make the Durham region rise again.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: When I spoke to the new mayor, he was crystal clear: He wants to fight for jobs. The workers at GM are even clearer. "They are not closing our damn plant without one hell of a fight"—that's what the workers are saying. Even the Conservative MP for Durham says, "We owe it to the workers and their families to explore what can be done to preserve Oshawa as an automotive hub." But when Oshawa looks to the Premier of this province for hope, all they see is, "It's over. It's done."

When is this government going to show some leadership, bring together workers, municipal leaders, auto parts and other supply chain businesses, and start working on a plan to keep these good jobs in Oshawa?

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that one thing we won't be doing is grandstanding on the backs of people who have just lost their jobs in the Durham region. When Premier Ford and our team were standing out in front of the Pickering nuclear station earlier this summer, making sure that we were committed to saving 7,500 jobs at that facility, where was the NDP? They want to close down the nuclear facility in Pickering.

We're going to do everything that we can to ensure that we have good-paying jobs on the ground, and that's why

we've made the changes that we have made. I don't know what the leader of the NDP wants us to do. Does she want us to nationalize auto jobs in Canada? Is that what she wants?

We are going to provide the supports that the workers on the ground in Oshawa need. We're there. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has her rapid-response team on the ground to make sure we're helping those who need us at this time of need, Mr. Speaker.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Deputy Premier. But I have to say, it's not about what I want, Speaker; it's what the workers in Oshawa want, and they want fighters. They want fighters to stand up for them, not a government that gives up and walks away from the concerns that these families have.

Yesterday, General Motors said that its goal in global restructuring was to focus on electric vehicles to transition to a low-carbon economy. They're scrambling to catch up where they see the auto industry going, to catch up to where the industry is going. The Premier's plan for electric cars seems to consist of scrapping incentives that encourage innovation and fighting electric carmakers in court. Why is the government moving Ontario out of this sector exactly when carmakers are looking to break into it?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Todd Smith: Again, Mr. Speaker, it just speaks to the knowledge of the leader of the official opposition of what is actually happening on the ground. We're actually removing red tape in the industry. We're removing red tape, which is going to allow for technology advancements in Ontario, and that includes in the automotive sector.

As a matter of fact, General Motors is making a significant investment in the technology centre that they have in Markham. There are 500 jobs there now. General Motors plans to create 1,000 jobs at that Markham facility, Mr. Speaker, and one of the reasons that they're doing that is because the Ontario government is getting out of the way and removing some of the barriers and red tape that exist in that sector.

The NDP seems to want to give those on the ground a false sense of hope. I would say that that false sense of hope from the leader of the NDP is disingenuous at best, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The minister will withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Hon. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, notwithstanding the way that the government is deciding to respond to this, smart government policy has been crucial in making the auto sector the linchpin of Ontario's economy for decades. But the Premier has shunned the idea of an auto strategy and denounced job-creating government investments in industries like the auto sector. Instead, he proposes no-strings-attached corporate tax giveaways that go to companies even when they lay people off by the thousands. Given the announcement in Oshawa yesterday, does this government really believe that this plan is working?

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, we are doing everything that we possibly can here in the government of Ontario to ensure that we're creating an environment in this province for investments: for investments in our auto sector, for investments in our manufacturing sector. I don't know how the leader of the NDP can stand there with a straight face and ask these questions when what they're looking to do is put up barriers, increase costs, corporate tax increases, jacking up carbon taxes in the province of Ontario.

They supported the Liberal government, hand in glove, as electricity prices have soared through the roof to some of the highest in North America. They supported them on Bill 148, a job killer here in Ontario. They are guilty as an accomplice to that terrible Liberal government that we've had for the last 15 years. It's impossible to take these questions with any—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Order. The government side will come to order.

Start the clock. Final supplementary.

1050

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Over the last 24 hours, I've had the chance to speak with union leadership and Oshawa's new mayor. Our MPP for Oshawa has been on the ground meeting with workers and families tirelessly. They all agree with what industry experts and parts suppliers have been telling me for a long time: Ontario needs an auto strategy, especially if we're going to fight to save jobs in Oshawa.

Why is the government sitting on their hands without a plan?

Hon. Todd Smith: Our plan is to ensure that Ontario is open for business. That's for auto manufacturers, that's for all manufacturers and that's for the technology sector.

I can tell you today, Mr. Speaker, that although we got some devastating news—and I appreciate the member from Oshawa and the way she has been standing with her community and standing up for her community in a respectful way. I do want to say that we really do want to work hand in hand with the member from Oshawa, who has been at the heart of these job losses over the last couple of days, and ensure that the supports are there from the provincial government for those people on the ground in the Durham region, along with all of my colleagues who represent ridings in the Durham region.

What we're doing is creating an environment in Ontario for job creation. We're seeing a facility that just had the ribbon cut today—1,450 jobs in the London area. I just opened a facility—800 jobs here in downtown Toronto—this morning. We're making a—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Restart the clock. Next question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the deputy leader. The families facing job losses in Oshawa need a government with a plan to bring the jobs of tomorrow here to Ontario. They need a serious strategy, backed with

investments designed to create and keep good jobs in Canada. They need a government ready to fight for Oshawa.

Instead, they have a Premier whose plan for jobs consists of overpriced road signs, discounted beer and telling Oshawa families that there's no point in fighting for their jobs. Does the Acting Premier understand that this is just not good enough?

Hon. Christine Elliott: Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Todd Smith: Mr. Speaker, it's really hard to take these questions seriously, given what we've been doing for the last five months here in the Legislature. We're opening Ontario up for business.

If we had continued on the path that we were on, we would have the highest carbon tax in North America, if that party had their way. The soaring cost of electricity would continue to be outrageous, if this party had their way. They wanted to kill 7,500 jobs in the nuclear sector in Pickering—the low-cost, reliable form of electricity coming out of the Durham region. The NDP would have killed 7,500 jobs.

Here they are, standing up—and we do feel, certainly, for the people on the ground in Oshawa, but they're talking out of both sides of their mouth in the official opposition, Mr. Speaker.

I'll withdraw that. I'll withdraw that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. You can take your seat.

Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Notwithstanding the fallacies that this government continues to spread, the women and men who are facing catastrophic job losses in Oshawa need a government that's ready to step up to the plate and help them keep their jobs. Instead, we have a government that's asleep at the switch.

Instead of shrugging their shoulders and throwing in the towel, will this government join with the workers, municipal leaders, local businesses and concerned citizens who are ready to actually fight this decision, and start working on a plan to keep those good jobs in Oshawa?

Hon. Todd Smith: Apparently, the leader of the NDP didn't hear my answers earlier, because we are working with all of the individuals that the member just said.

We've been in constant communication, first of all, with the company. We've been in constant communication with our federal counterparts. We've been in communication with leadership on the ground, including the outgoing mayor, who will soon be the regional chair, Mr. Henry, and the incoming mayor of Oshawa, Mr. Carter. We met with them last night. We've met with Nancy Shaw, who is the CEO of the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce. We've talked with our counterpart in the region, the member from Oshawa, Jennifer French, to ensure that she knows what's happening from the provincial point of view.

Our Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, our minister of the Treasury Board, our Minister of the Environment, local MPPs Park, Coe, Smith and Piccini—we were all there last night in a show of solidarity to build a plan so that we can bring Oshawa back up onto its feet,

because it is going to do well, not under a false premise but with a real plan—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the minister once again to withdraw his unparliamentary comment.

Hon. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Next question.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Lindsey Park: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. I want to thank the minister and the Premier for coming to Oshawa last night.

Yesterday was a hard day for a lot of my constituents and across Durham region. For many, General Motors is a part of the family tree. For years, workers did everything they could to keep the plant open. However, yesterday the Wall Street Journal summarized the problem when it said "Canada is among the most expensive countries in the world to build cars and the highest-cost market for car assembly in the North American free trade zone."

Speaker, can the minister tell the House what our government is doing to make Ontario more competitive and bring businesses to Ontario?

Hon. Todd Smith: That's a great question, and I thank the member from Durham for the question this morning.

I want to stress that what the member stated is absolutely correct. Time and time again, Canadian auto workers at General Motors were measured as the most efficient and the most effective on the continent, but this is a global marketplace, and it's not enough for our workers to compete; we have to compete as a province.

For 15 years, we just didn't. But in the last six months, this government has repealed Bill 148. The finance minister has worked to create a lower tax rate and accelerate capital cost depreciation here in Ontario. The energy minister is on a crusade to undo the last decade of destruction that made energy poverty a reality not just for people on the ground, but for our business community in Ontario as well.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario is going to be competitive. That's how we bring business here and that's how we're going to keep good jobs here in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Lindsey Park: I want to thank the minister for his answer.

Back in May, the CEO of Magna had this to say about the auto sector in Ontario: "I get very frustrated when I see the decisions being made that put undue administrative costs and inefficiencies on our plants, specifically here in Ontario, because we have to compete.... We're not going to get business if we're forced to be uncompetitive."

I'm glad our government is taking the challenges faced by the auto sector seriously, but some challenges, like tariffs, require the co-operation of the federal government in order to keep plants open here in Ontario. Can the minister update the House on our efforts to fight tariffs and protect Ontario's auto sector?

Hon. Todd Smith: The member from Durham has highlighted an important part of the equation here, and that is the aluminum and steel tariffs that remain in place even after the signing of the USMCA. The average car crosses the border seven times before it's fully assembled, and tariffs on steel make life harder for parts manufacturers and car manufacturers to do their jobs.

Since coming to government on June 29, Ontario has sent deputations to the United States congressional committees. We've worked with state governments and our counterparts there. Just a couple of weeks ago, I had a great conversation with the American ambassador, Kelly Craft, to talk about our trading relationship with the United States and how important that is on both sides of the border.

We're calling on the federal government to press the Americans to lift section 232—those are the tariffs on steel and aluminum—because keeping them in place is harming our auto manufacturing on both sides of the border. It's a win-win to remove those tariffs now for the US and for us here in Ontario.

1100

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: My question is to the Acting Premier. As everyone in this room knows, yesterday my community was rocked by the news that GM is intending to close operations in Oshawa. Oshawa Carriage Works started in Oshawa 140 years ago and became the cornerstone of GM, and GM Canada just celebrated 100 years in Oshawa. I was there. We have a long story of commitment.

This is devastating news. Words cannot express how my community is feeling. Oshawa didn't build GM—excuse me; yes, it did. Oshawa built GM from the beginning. It was a dream and an idea, and they now can have a global conversation because of their community start.

This government talks about wanting to create good jobs. We have thousands and thousands and thousands of them in Oshawa, and once they're gone, they're gone forever. The people of Oshawa are feeling abandoned by their employer; they don't want to feel abandoned by their government. And to find out that the Premier comes in, after dinnertime, and has a huge meeting with all of the folks, but none of them from labour—I would have brought my own chair had I been invited. I was in Oshawa all day. I would love to have a conversation with this government.

The question I want to know now is, will this government talk to workers? Will this government protect these jobs before it's too late?

Hon. Christine Elliott: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks to the member from Oshawa for the question this morning. I can only imagine how difficult it is for her losing these kinds of jobs that have been there for literally a century in Oshawa.

I had the opportunity to speak to the member yesterday morning, along with the member from London West, to update them on how things were proceeding and the messages that we had been getting from both GM Canada and

GM global. I know that the Premier had an opportunity to talk to labour over the last couple of days, with Mr. Dias and Unifor, to talk about what this means for the labour force in Oshawa and express to him certainly our displeasure with the decisions that were made by GM, but also to explain that we had asked GM if there was anything we could possibly do to reverse this decision that's part of a global restructuring. This wasn't a kneejerk reaction. Certainly we've seen that eight plants across North America and around the world are closing as a result of this.

Our commitment is that our team is going to work with folks on the ground in Oshawa, including the member opposite, to ensure we have a positive outcome for the Oshawa region.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I want to let everyone in my community and in this House know that I'm not going to give up the fight to keep these jobs in Oshawa, where they belong.

Yesterday was an unbelievably challenging day, and we have many ahead of us. I spent time with the workers, who are my friends, my neighbours. We are reeling. We are reeling. Our community—

Applause.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: No, no. I've got to get this out.

Our community is building fantastic vehicles and wants to continue to do that work and to have those great jobs. On the day, though, that we got the news of a closure on the horizon, it was really tough to not only get that news but to hear the Premier announce, after one conversation with GM Canada, that the ship has left the dock. The Premier jumped straight to damage control and skipped right over the year that we have until December 2019. That is like tapping out before you even get in the ring.

We want a Premier and a government that are willing to fight to protect our jobs, not to fold like a cheap suit. Oshawa will fight to protect our jobs. We invite the province to stand alongside us. Speaker, will this Premier stand with workers and fight to keep good jobs in Ontario and Oshawa?

Hon. Todd Smith: Thanks for the question. I certainly do understand how upsetting and disappointing and heart-breaking this is for families right across the Durham region. The Premier said so yesterday as well. This is such a stressful time for families, especially heading into the Christmas period.

We are doing everything that we can as the government of Ontario to ensure that General Motors continues to have a significant presence in Ontario. They do have the CAMI facility in Ingersoll, they have the engine plant in St. Catharines, the technology centre in Markham, and the headquarters is going to remain in Oshawa.

We want to ensure that we have that relationship so that we can see further expansion from General Motors and that the workers at General Motors now—one of the lines is shutting down in June. The other two lines are to shut down or have unallocated resources at the end of December.

We're doing everything we can to support those people on the ground and ensure that we can have new jobs and

new hope for the people in Oshawa with our plan to make Ontario open for business

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. I and many Ontarians were saddened to learn of the planned closure of the General Motors plant in Oshawa. I know this will impact thousands of families in Oshawa, the GTA and eastern Ontario, many of whom have worked at GM for years and have become highly trained professional workers. These are people who take pride in their work and know that it's crucial that they return to the workforce as soon as possible.

Many of the affected workers will need help to learn new skills to rejoin the workforce in a new, highly skilled position. Can the minister tell us what this government is doing to ensure that the workers at GM will have the supports they need to reskill and find another job?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member from Whitby for that question.

First, I want to express my sympathy for the thousands of families who will be affected by the closure at GM.

When the government learned about the planned closure, Premier Ford and I directed officials to reach out to GM as quickly as possible and initiate the Rapid Re-employment and Training Service program. Under that program, my ministry will be in regular contact with GM to ensure they and their employees have the information about training services provided by our government. I will make sure that services and training necessary are readily available so that impacted employees can rejoin the workforce as soon as possible.

No doubt there will be difficult times ahead, but I can assure the member and the affected families that they have my commitment that we will be there for them to help them get back on their feet.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the minister for that thoughtful response. I'm happy to hear that our government is already getting involved through this Rapid Re-employment and Training Service program and asking all levels of government to work together to help impacted families with the support, assistance and relief they need.

Many of the workers will need help to learn new skills to rejoin the workforce in a new, highly skilled position. However, Speaker, there are some people calling on the government to do more to reverse this unfortunate business decision by General Motors, which is affecting plants in the United States as well as the Oshawa GM plant.

Can the Minister of Labour explain what else our government has done to provide assistance to the workers affected by the planned closure in 2019?

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: To the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Laurie Scott: I want to thank the member from Whitby for the question, and express my sympathy for all the families who will be impacted by this planned GM closure.

In my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, I know hundreds of people who have worked or have retired from the Oshawa assembly plant.

I can reassure the members that our government has acted quickly to find ways to assist those workers who have been impacted by this planned closure.

Under the leadership of Premier Ford, our government has asked the federal government to immediately extend employment insurance eligibility by five weeks to a maximum of 50 weeks in the impacted EI regions. We've also asked the federal government to extend the duration of work-sharing agreements by an additional 38 weeks to a total of 76 weeks and allow for immediate reapplication for expired agreements.

Our government is taking these measures to ensure our impacted workers in the auto sector can fully access EI benefits when they need them most. Mr. Speaker, we are there for the families and the workers impacted.

1110

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch.

Remarks in Oji-Cree.

My question is for the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. A big part of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth's advocacy role is addressing systemic issues impacting First Nations children and youth. The act itself highlights the need to pay attention to First Nations children. This is particularly important to the people in the Far North, where in 2017 we lost 38 children and youth to suicide.

So, Mr. Speaker, the question is: Without access to a provincial child advocate today, who will First Nations children and families reach out to when the system is failing them or when they are falling through the cracks?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thank you very much for the question. Meegwetch. I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to talk about what our government is doing in order to strengthen accountability in children's aid societies as well for children in custody across the province of Ontario. Our most vulnerable children deserve better, and we will be holding those responsible for those children to a higher standard and a stronger accountability mechanism by ensuring that there's an investigative unit within the Ombudsman's office that is dedicated to children. It will be turnkey.

But there's more that we're going to be doing as a government. We are committed to improving the outcomes of Ontario's child protection system through the creation of three new tables dedicated to sharing ideas of empowerment that work. It started last week. We're going to continue to move forward. I'm pleased—and I'll talk more about it in the supplemental—but we will ensure there will be an Indigenous-led table. I will be happy to consult the member opposite, as well as the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, as we move forward with this new model, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: The question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services again. Mr. Speaker, tables are fine but they are no substitute to having

an independent office of this Legislature to advocate for and with our youth. That's what the Feathers of Hope initiative is. That's what the independent advocate did when there was an inquest into the deaths of seven youths in Thunder Bay.

Without an independent child advocate mandated to focus on First Nations children and youth, how will Ontario ensure that the children of Kiiwetinoong and others from the Far North are given every opportunity to grow and flourish?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Members, take their seats.

Minister.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Thanks very much, Speaker. Again, I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Look, we are moving towards a stronger, more robust accountability mechanism for those who may seek to harm children or who are not there. We are ensuring that the Ombudsman, who is the chief investigator in this area now, will have the opportunity to pursue more child protection mechanisms while ensuring that there is an advocacy component within our office.

I want to make it very clear to the members opposite, who do not understand the difference between what investigation components and oversight are as opposed to what advocacy is: Last year alone, the Ombudsman received 367 complaints about children's aid societies and had to refer them to the child advocate, who didn't have a strong and investigative component. So that's why, with the new, expanded—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Member for Hamilton Mountain, come to order.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: The Ombudsman's expanded oversight capabilities will remain and we will ensure that there are going to be greater child protection systems. But I want to be perfectly clear: Any report that has been done or is pending by the child advocate will be sent over to the Ombudsman for greater oversight and accountability, and we're going to take action immediately.

SENIORS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Ma question est pour le ministre des Services aux aînés et de l'Accessibilité. I was speaking with a 90-year-old woman this morning. She's here at the Provincial Council of Women of Ontario, and lives with very limited means and needs to be supported by her brother. I've spoken with many seniors in the community of Orléans and across the province who are actually unsure about what the fall economic statement means about their finances and their future. They are worried that this government will not be there for them when they need it most.

As some of you know, I used to own a retirement residence. I understand the aging process well and I know how it affects families. Mr. Speaker, does the minister and his government believe in supporting seniors, whose population is expected to double by 2041?

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Thank you for the very important question. I would like to refer your question to the Minister of Social Services.

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: I want to applaud the minister responsible for accessibility and seniors. He's doing a tremendous job on behalf of them. I believe, in fact, he is the oldest cabinet minister in Ontario history, so congratulations to you.

The fall economic statement was very clear on how we're going to support those who are on limited incomes with the LIFT program that our Minister of Finance rolled out. This past week, we were prepared to roll out more changes on social assistance so that Ontario's most vulnerable will have a pathway to getting out of poverty rather than sticking in it.

I just want to point out to the member opposite that during the time that her government was in office, one in seven Ontarians was struggling in poverty, and they were stuck there. What we are offering as a government is a multi-ministerial approach, where we work together as the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Housing, the Minister of Education, the minister responsible for seniors and the minister responsible for the Attorney General. We're working together because we recognize that each individual in Ontario needs to be lifted up as best they possibly can.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I appreciate the minister—I'm quite disappointed the actual minister for seniors affairs couldn't stand up and speak on seniors' issues, maybe like the Minister of Francophone Affairs, actually.

What I can tell you is that the seniors I spoke with don't only want to be looked at through the lens of health care or any others. They're not feeling supported by this government. They are concerned about the LIFT tax plan, which does not apply to low-income pensioners. They've been told that it only applies to employment income. This means this tax credit is not going to be helping many people in one of the fastest-growing groups of the population of Ontario.

Speaker, seniors want to participate and contribute actively to their communities. Does the minister really think that a single senior—I would say, in the vast majority, women who have outlived their spouses—earning under \$30,000 a year in pension income does not deserve support?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: This government has been all about supporting the people of Ontario since we took office. We are reversing some of the most damaging policies that Liberal government put forward, including in social assistance where for 15 years they operated a disjointed patchwork system that kept one in seven people living in poverty, including seniors in this province.

That's why, for the first time in over 15 years, this government brought in an across-the-board 1.5% increase in Ontario Works and ODSP. That's why this government is going to create better wraparound supports for those who are on ODSP and Ontario Works. That's why this government is going to be putting more people back to work by supporting them—not ignoring them—and empowering them and making sure that there's dignity in the situation,

which is something, by the way, during the 13 years that I sat in opposition over there, I watched them squander. Shame on them.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Norman Miller: My question is for the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. I know our government for the people has been working hard to improve the lives of everyone who calls Ontario home. We are cutting red tape, making responsible investments and making sure that we get our economy going again.

Mr. Speaker, 15 years of the Liberal government has made it a very difficult task, but I know my colleagues and I are up to the job. We are investing in local businesses that help communities grow.

Can the minister please tell the members of this House about how our government is working for northern Ontario businesses?

1120

Hon. Greg Rickford: I appreciate the question from the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka, a strong advocate not only for Parry Sound–Muskoka but for the entire region of northern Ontario.

We have a Premier and caucus that want to ensure that northern Ontario is as much open for business as any part of this province. They know what we can contribute when we make targeted and strategic investments, but as well ensure that it doesn't take seven years for a mine to open, and ensure that by reducing red tape, our forestry sector and our mining sector have a chance to respond to the market today.

That's why we're moving ahead with so many different initiatives across the region: opening up northern Ontario for business; addressing the Far North Act because it has made little progress to collaborate with First Nations communities; or negotiating a deal that would keep Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie. Thank goodness for the member of Sault Ste. Marie and his hard work in that community.

We're protecting jobs and keeping northern Ontario open for business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Norman Miller: Thank you to the minister for his work on these files and for his support for northern Ontario. There's no doubt that our government is doing everything it can to ensure we create economic prosperity right across our province.

The members of this House are well aware of the important investments our government has continued to make to support this goal. Last week, I was very pleased to announce one of these investments in my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka. Our government announced a \$968,000 investment to build a multi-purpose centre in Carling to host community activities and private functions. This investment provides a much-needed space for families to gather and host special events.

Can the minister please tell the members of this House more about how this investment will benefit the community of Carling and area?

Hon. Greg Rickford: As I said earlier, we're making the kind of targeted investments that make sense in northern communities. We have a lot of small towns, isolated and remote Indigenous communities and some bigger cities that are not to the scale of the ones down here in southern Ontario. Our great northern Ontario gang out here knows where those investments are, because we work closely with those community members. Even for ridings where there's no Progressive Conservative member for now, we continue to make sure that they're connected and that we're investing in the projects that matter.

This particular one was a 9,443-square-foot facility to host family gatherings, conferences and business functions and serve as an emergency shelter. Its fully licensed commercial kitchen will help support training and host larger events.

We congratulate the town of Carling and their outstanding member of provincial Parliament for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

The projects like it—the fall economic statement—we'll continue to support northern Ontario. Let's just hope the northern Ontario caucus—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

Next question.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M. Gilles Bisson: Ma question est pour la ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones. Madame la Ministre, vous savez que votre gouvernement, le gouvernement de M. Ford, a décidé de fermer le bureau du commissaire aux services en français et de canceler la construction d'une nouvelle université. Moi, je vous demande une question, comme francophone, comme citoyen et comme individu. Est-ce que vous, comme personne, comme francophone fière et affichée, supportez cette décision?

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Notre gouvernement a démontré vendredi soir, avec nos annonces, notre volonté de travailler pour les francophones et avec les francophones pour faire avancer les enjeux d'importance pour les francophones.

En ce qui concerne le commissariat, nous avons été très clairs que notre gouvernement va proposer des modifications au projet de loi 57 pour assurer qu'on crée un poste de commissaire aux services en français au sein du Bureau de l'ombudsman. Notre but est de trouver la meilleure façon de protéger les droits linguistiques des Franco-Ontariens et des francophones ici en Ontario, mais aussi en préservant l'argent des contribuables.

Le commissaire va conserver la responsabilité d'enquêter et de déposer ses rapports auprès de l'Assemblée législative. Il va conserver également la fonction de formuler ses recommandations visant à améliorer la prestation des services en français.

Monsieur le Président, je demanderais au député de l'opposition de ne pas politiser ces décisions. Nous allons veiller à ce que les droits linguistiques en Ontario soient préservés tout en préservant l'argent des—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

M. Gilles Bisson: Madame la Ministre, ce l'est, politique—très politique. Vous venez d'une famille, la famille de Mulroney, qui est francophone affichée, un premier ministre qui a oeuvré pour la communauté francophone.

Vous, comme francophone, je vous demande la question, non comme ministre : est-ce que vous comme francophone de l'Ontario supportez la décision de fermer ces services-ci en Ontario, oui ou non?

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Once again, I'll remind all members to make their comments through the Chair.

Minister.

L'hon. Caroline Mulroney: Bien sûr, j'ai une énorme fierté de ce que mon père a fait pour le Canada, ce qu'il a fait pour les francophones ici au Canada. Ce qu'il a fait pour les francophones au Canada a servi à tous les Canadiens. Ce que nous faisons ici en Ontario, ça va servir à tous les Ontariens, y compris les Franco-Ontariens.

Je peux vous dire, en tant que francophone fière, que les changements que nous avons proposés au bureau du commissariat—même avec ces changements, on va continuer à préserver les droits linguistiques ici en Ontario.

Pour ce qui est de l'Université de l'Ontario français, on va continuer à travailler sur ce projet si important pour les Franco-Ontariens, un projet pour et par les francophones. Mais avec ce qui a été légué, le déficit de 15 milliards de dollars et la dette de presque 350 milliards de dollars, il faut remettre l'Ontario sur la voie de la prospérité pour tous les Ontariens, y compris les Franco-Ontariens. C'est une fois qu'on aura fait ça qu'on va pouvoir consacrer du financement réel derrière ce projet qui est complètement—

Le Président (L'hon. Ted Arnott): Merci.

Next question.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Ms. Jill Dunlop: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. Our government members are aware of the disdain that the previous Liberal government had for the hunting and fishing communities. This 15 years of neglect created an unfair moose tag draw system that failed to meet the needs of the hunting community and the tourist industry in northern Ontario. The previous government had years to repair a well-known problem, but instead chose to ignore the issue and focused on raising taxes for Ontarians.

Mr. Speaker, the draw needs to be fixed so that the hunt can benefit hunters and our northern communities by supporting tourism and small businesses. Can the minister update the House on what steps are being taken to ensure that future moose tag draws will be done in a fair manner?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I thank the member for the question. Our government for the people has listened to the concerns of hunters, and my ministry is reviewing Ontario's approach to managing moose. We'll work with an advisory committee which will review moose management, including the tag draw system, with the intention of making it fairer, more accessible and simpler for hunters.

As the review unfolds, we will continue to listen and engage hunters and stakeholders to inform future decisions on how tag holders are developed and distributed. We will investigate new and improved ways of meeting the needs of hunters with continued hunting opportunities.

The member is correct: The system needs to be fixed. My ministry will provide the solutions necessary so that we can finally have a moose management approach that works to the benefit of hunters, businesses and our northern communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary.

Ms. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I know it will be reassuring to both my constituents as well as to those in our rural and remote communities to know that they finally have a government that works for the people.

The current situation is a personal one for a lot of Ontarians who are avid hunters and use the moose tag system frequently. Fixing the moose tag draw will be for the benefit of hunters all across Ontario, and I'm sure they are eager to know when they can expect to see the results of the review from the committee. Can the minister provide a timeline of when the review will be completed?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you again to the member. I'm glad to hear that she agrees that the review will bring relief to the members' constituents and Ontarians across the province.

1130

The Ontario Moose-Bear Allocation Advisory Committee is typically made up of six members with related experience appointed by the Public Appointments Secretariat. As part of our overall review, we will revamp the advisory committee to make sure they are set up for a thorough review of Ontario's moose management system.

I also want to reiterate what I said in my previous answer. Throughout the review, my ministry will continue to engage and listen to the concerns of hunters and other stakeholders so that our new approach is one that works for the people and actually addresses the problem. As the member knows, the current system is quite complex. The advisory committee will work over the next two years to ensure that we get this right and that we finally have a moose management system to make moose hunting fairer and more accessible.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question to the Minister of Energy: There are serious questions about OPG's sale of the Hearn generating station that the government needs to answer. We know that when the Premier was a city councillor, he met behind closed doors with developers to cook up a vision for Toronto's waterfront. That vision included an NFL stadium on the Hearn site, then controlled by Mario Cortellucci, a major donor and fundraiser for the PC Party and the Ford family.

Mr. Cortellucci's group has acquired the site at a suspiciously low price. Has the Premier or his staff had any discussions with developers for OPG about the Hearn site since he became Premier? If so, what did he discuss or promise?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Ontario Power Generation operates at arm's length from the government of Ontario and it is responsible for its own operational decisions. Studios of America has leased this land since 2002. The terms of their lease included the first right of offer to purchase the land if it ever became for sale. By divesting this land, OPG has shielded taxpayers from any long-term environmental liabilities associated with a former coal generating station. This decision is in the best interests of taxpayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Again to the Minister of Energy: That was a very cautious answer.

During the last PC government, there was scandal after scandal, where insiders were able to buy government properties cheap and flip them for a massive profit. Several employees of the Ontario Realty Corp. were charged and convicted. In yet another scandal, the Conservatives appointed the party official who controlled their donations to be CEO of the Ontario Pension Board. The official then approved \$36.3 million in cheap loans to the top donor of the PC Party. That donor was Mario Cortellucci.

It's time to clear the air. Will the government allow an independent evaluation of the Hearn property so we can determine if this deal was fair?

Hon. Greg Rickford: This decision is in the best interest of taxpayers. By divesting this land, OPG has shielded taxpayers from any long-term environmental protection associated with the former coal generating station. Studios of America has leased this land since 2002, and the terms of the lease included the first right of offer to purchase land if it ever became for sale.

Ontario Power Generation operates at arm's length from the government of Ontario and is responsible for its own operational decisions.

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is to the Minister of Labour. Double-hatters are full-time professional firefighters who also provide volunteer services. Minister, I understand that many rural and small municipalities rely on double-hatters to protect local homes, families and businesses.

For many years—almost two decades, in fact—double-hatters who volunteer in small and rural communities as firefighters have faced the potential of disciplinary action and even threats to their full-time jobs because of how they choose to volunteer in their free time. Many of these double-hatters have been forced to stop volunteering for fear of fines and disciplinary action.

Can the minister explain to this House what the government is doing with regard to double-hatters and how this will benefit the many communities relying on these volunteers to stay safe?

Hon. Laurie Scott: I'd like to thank the member from Mississauga East—Cooksville for his tireless work in his community.

One of the first speeches I gave right here in this Legislature was on the importance of protecting public safety and the need to protect our professional firefighters who,

in their free time, act as volunteer firefighters in their communities. These heroic double-hatters are some of my community's most dedicated volunteers. They are protecting their neighbours' lives and homes.

Through Bill 57, our government is enshrining the right of our professional firefighters to volunteer their time whenever they want and wherever they want. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Ontario's professional firefighters are double-hatting. These amendments will allow municipalities to resist any pressure to dismiss professional firefighters for double-hatting and ensure that they do not face penalties for choosing to serve their communities as a volunteer firefighter.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock.

Restart the clock. Supplementary?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you, Minister, for that explanation. Through you, Mr. Speaker, it seems not only strange but also wrong that firefighters would face disciplinary action and persecution for choosing to volunteer as firefighters in their own communities. We know that double-hatters care deeply for the health and safety of their communities and that fire chiefs across rural Ontario depend on their double-hatters to provide training and mentoring to other volunteer firefighters.

Can the minister tell us what this government is doing to permanently protect professional firefighters who are keeping our communities safe in rural Ontario?

Hon. Laurie Scott: I have waited 15 years for the province to take action. If passed, our changes will prohibit associations from disciplining members for double-hatting, allow municipalities to resist any pressure to dismiss double-hatters, ensure that professional firefighters cannot face association penalties for double-hatting, and perhaps, most importantly, our legislation will apply those protections retrospectively.

Today in Ontario, there are 18,000 volunteer, 11,000 full-time and 600 part-time firefighters. In other words, Mr. Speaker, 60% of Ontario's firefighters are volunteers. I am hopeful that Bill 57 may not only protect today's double-hatters, but will also welcome back firefighters who found other outlets for their volunteer community service. I'm very proud of that piece of legislation.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. Yesterday, I asked the minister about how the government's changes to social assistance will hurt Ontarians with disabilities. The plan includes zero support for Ontarians with disabilities who cannot work, and it will take more money out of the pockets of people who are able to work, because the more they make, the more gets clawed back. To quote the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, "Forcing people off social assistance while depressing work conditions in the midst of a housing crisis won't move people out of poverty."

Will the minister explain how taking more money out of the pockets of working people and offering nothing to

those who can't work at all will eliminate poverty in Ontario?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I don't know where the member opposite gets her information, but this was the first government in 15 years to raise 1.5% increases across the board in Ontario Works and in ODSP at the same time. We've also brought in the LIFT from the fall economic statement that's going to make sure people will keep more of their hard-earned money in their pocket, and they won't have to pay additional taxes.

1140

What I announced last week was that those who are on Ontario disability supports will end up seeing more wraparound services than they've ever seen and they will come out further ahead than they've ever been. Those who can work, on Ontario Works: We'll be making sure that they have the supports in place.

But don't take my word for it; take Paul Johnson's, the city of Hamilton's general manager of health and safe communities. He said: "The city of Hamilton has undertaken an integrated approach to services and will work with the province to reduce the administrative burden on those who provide social assistance, thereby ensuring more time is spent with those we serve...."

Or we could talk to Michael Allen from United Way, who says, "Today's announcement signals Minister MacLeod's intention to evolve Ontario's social assistance system to more effectively serve the needs of vulnerable people and interrupt the cycle of poverty."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Restart the clock. Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Back to the minister: The changes to the earnings threshold will be a disincentive to work, because the more you make, the more the government will claw back. If you are on ODSP but able to work and earn more than \$500 a month, you will only be able to keep 25 cents on the dollar. The same goes for Ontario Works if you earn more than \$300 a month.

Trish Huculak, a social assistance recipient in Scarborough—someone that the minister wasn't actually interested in talking to, the recipients—told the CBC that recipients "are going to end up with what they had before. It's not going to help them; it's going to keep them impoverished."

The minister likes to talk about the 1.5% increase, which actually amounts to, if you qualify for the maximum benefit, \$11.50 a month for Ontario Works and \$17.50 a month for ODSP.

Does the minister think it's fair if she only got to keep 25 cents of every dollar she worked for, and does she think she could live above the poverty line by only keeping 25 cents of every dollar that she earns?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I am going to reject that question out of hand. It is factually incorrect, and the member opposite knows it. All she's doing is trying to scaremonger Ontario's most vulnerable people.

Here are the statistics: We have one million people on social assistance in this province. It costs \$10 billion, yet

still, one out of seven people is trapped in a cycle of poverty because of a disjointed, patchwork system that did nothing to stabilize people's lives or get them back on track.

That's why I'm pleased to have the endorsement of Pedro Barata, the senior vice-president of community impact and strategy of United Way Greater Toronto, who says, "A more client-centred, locally-driven approach, [with] focus on investment in wrap-around supports & co-ordination among services and sectors, is essential for building pathways to economic opportunity."

I said it once before, and I'll say it once again: The best social program in this province is a job.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Stop the clock. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. The House will come to order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The House will come to order.

There's still a member who wants to ask a question. Out of respect for him, the House will come to order.

Start the clock.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Amarjot Sandhu: My question is to the honourable Minister of Children, Community and Social Services.

In Ontario, we look out for each other: neighbours helping neighbours, demonstrating compassion when those in vulnerable circumstances need help the most. Ontario's social safety net was built on this premise, a premise of compassion and dignity. But today, one in seven Ontarians is living in poverty, and after 15 years of mismanagement, our social assistance system has become a patchwork of programs and services that trap people in a cycle of poverty.

Minister, last week, you unveiled your plan to reform Ontario's social assistance system and get our people working. Can you please tell this House how you are restoring dignity and compassion for those who need it most?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: What a great question—respectful, to the point and actually acknowledging the true facts of where we are in the province of Ontario today.

Let me be perfectly clear: Ontario's plan for social assistance is focused on the people who are in the most vulnerable circumstances in our province. For those who can work, we are providing them a path out of poverty; for those who cannot work, they will receive better and more compassionate support, which has been identified by many of our stakeholders across Ontario. For those with disabilities, we will ensure that they are living with dignity; we will consolidate ODSP supplements and benefits into simplified financial supports so that front-line staff can easily connect to clients to support them. We'll also institute a flat \$6,000 annual earnings exemption plus a 25% exemption for earnings over that limit. We will cut red tape and restore accountability. We need to digitize services to make program delivery more efficient—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. That concludes question period for today.

There being no deferred votes, this House is recessed—oh, just a sec. Point of order.

VISITOR

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: I am very pleased to just take a moment and introduce a great individual from Scarborough. I see here today trustee Nancy Crawford from the Toronto Catholic District School Board.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you.

I'll try once again: This House stands in recess now until 3 p.m.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Deepak Anand: It's an honour to acknowledge Mr. Jai Prakash Dalal, visiting here from India, from the state of Haryana, where my wife was born. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: This morning, I had the pleasure of hosting the Ottawa Real Estate Board in my office. I was pleased to meet with them. I wanted to welcome Penny Torontow, Janice Myers, Jennifer Morley and Patricia Verge here at Queen's Park today. Patricia does happen to live in the riding of Carleton. I look forward to continuing our conversation back in Ottawa.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Mr. Kevin Yarde: Everyone in this province has the right to be safe and to feel free. That is why keeping our community safe is our top priority and it is obliged of us that we do the best we can to ensure that. Our paramedics, police officers, correctional officers and firefighters across the province are instrumental in making that happen. These professionals put their life on the line each and every day to help others in dangerous and life-threatening situations. Therefore, it is only fair that we assist them in their times of need.

After meeting with firefighters, paramedics, the police and correctional officers as well as associations and unions that represent them, one thing is clear: The government needs to do more for those who are exposed to trauma as a natural and unavoidable part of their work and who consequently develop post-traumatic stress disorder. We need to commit to working with our forces across the province and increase investment in mental health and other programs so that those who need the support can access it in a timely and dignified manner.

While recognition of post-traumatic stress among front-line and first responders continues to grow, the access to the services they receive to help them with their PTSD remains uneven. This has often been a fight every step along the way. These professionals deserve better, and I sincerely hope this government makes the necessary

investments to ensure that they get the services they so dearly need and deserve.

GERRY BENSON

Mr. Jim McDonell: I rise today to celebrate the life of a successful Cornwall businessman, Gerry Benson. In 1953, Gerry founded the Benson Group, headquartered in Cornwall, which would become one of the largest automotive businesses in eastern Canada, serving over 100 locations from Kapuskasing to Windsor to Trois-Rivières. One of the most recent additions to the Benson Group is a tire retreading facility in Cornwall.

With his business firmly established, our riding benefited greatly from Gerry's philanthropy. In 2002, he sponsored the Benson Charity Golf Classic, which would raise more than \$500,000 for local charities. Gerry's surname is now synonymous with Cornwall hockey after the company came forward to be the main sponsor for the city's new multi-recreational facility, the Benson Centre.

The company, through Gerry, also made an imprint in education by supporting the automotive department of the Cornwall campus of St. Lawrence College. Gerry also spearheaded the creation of the university steering committee, which he chaired, to attract university education to Cornwall. His work culminated in the announcement in 2015 of a new credit-transfer agreement between Carleton University and St. Lawrence College.

His continued investment of his time and connections led to the creation of the Cornwall Innovation Centre in 2017, modelled after Carleton's Lead to Win program. The centre spawned the Ontario Emerging Jobs Institute earlier this year, a medium-term project that will bring students to the Nav Centre to learn skills in agri-tech and related businesses.

For his lifelong efforts, Gerry was awarded a lifetime achievement award by the Cornwall Chamber of Commerce and received the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal.

On behalf of my constituents in Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, I would like to offer my condolences to Gerry's wife, Claudette, and their children, Marty, James, Kelly and Joy, and their families. Thank you for letting Gerry work with the community.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Jill Andrew: I rise today, with sheer disgust, on the proposed cuts to the ODSP and to OW.

I have a letter here from Sammy Jo, one of our constituents. I'm going to read an excerpt from her letter:

"I am writing this letter in the hopes you will fight for the lives of people dependent upon social assistance, many of whom face other barriers and marginalizations. I am writing to respond to the rhetoric and actions of the current Ford government to restructure social assistance, including ending the Basic Income Pilot project.

"I am a child of deaf adults. The deaf community is my community.... The decision to implement a review/restructuring of ... social assistance ... without

consultation with the deaf and” the disabled “communities is an insult.... The lives of my loved ones, friends and clients depend on such support.

“If the best social assistance is a job, like this government claims, what resources are being given to ensure” that we have real “jobs (meaningful, healthy,” livable “jobs)...? What about those who ... cannot work 9 to 5?”

“Please bring these concerns to Parliament. Please represent the deaf and disabled constituents here in St. Paul’s. Social assistance isn’t charity, it is action and support that can help to equalize many of the injustices in our society. I fear what changes Minister Lisa MacLeod will implement in November. Poverty,” she forgot, “is a disability issue.”

Thank you, Sammy Jo.

ACROSS U-HUB

Mr. Billy Pang: I would like to recognize the amazing work that Across U-hub does every day for our youth in the GTA.

This charitable community organization assists young people’s social, emotional, cultural, physical and spiritual growth. Across U-hub was established 14 years ago but, in the meantime, has managed to serve 81,000 participants through over 149 developmental programs.

Recently, I attended their 11th annual fundraising gala, which showcased East Asian culture, poetry and musical performances, all performed by Across U-hub participants.

Across U-hub has been successful in its aims with assisting its members, and during their reception dinner, I was able to truly realize it. A testimony given on behalf of one of the participants shed light on a young man’s struggle with depression and low self-esteem, and how this organization, through its various programs, provided him with the skills and confidence necessary to overcome the challenges he was facing.

Mr. Speaker, as a long-time supporter of this organization, I’m happy to bring this organization’s work to light. I look forward to continued years of support towards their outstanding efforts.

SCHOOL FACILITIES

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Today, I rise to address the Minister of Education on behalf of my constituents in London–Fanshawe whose children and families are still waiting for funding to arrive at the Thames Valley District School Board. The community of Summerside in my riding has been waiting for over a decade for a school to be built. Others, like Masonville Public School, Tweedsmuir Public School and Kettle Creek Public School, are also waiting.

In addition to schools, much-needed child care and family centres are also on the line in London.

It’s not fair to the families and children of London. They have waited long enough for these projects.

Your own Minister of Health said, “The money for these projects has been allocated. There is no pause or

delay in the approval process for these capital projects.” So what’s the holdup?

The member from Elgin–Middlesex–London has now decided to stir the pot on this issue by blaming the school board for holding up the process.

The finger pointing and the political games have to end. We are talking about children’s education here. The constant delays to score political points are self-serving and do nothing to help children and families.

1510

My constituents in Summerside cannot wait another year for a school. It is my hope that this re-approval process is not a tool for the government to delay funding or deny funding for the badly needed education infrastructure.

I would like to invite the Minister of Education to sit down and talk about what the ministry needs to get these projects moving forward.

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF ST. PAUL, L’AMOREAUX

Mr. Aris Babikian: I would like to express my warmest congratulations to St. Paul’s L’Amoreaux church on their 177-year anniversary.

Since its establishment in 1840, St. Paul’s has been an integral part of the Scarborough–Agincourt riding. The church has served many generations and continues to be a place where families and friends gather for Sunday services, social gatherings and outreach programs.

In the 1970s, the church’s visionary leaders joined other organizations in the area to establish the Agincourt Community Services Association, an organization committed to serving those in dire need in Scarborough–Agincourt.

Furthermore, since 1978, the church has hosted the SPLC seniors’ residence and has shared an integral relationship with the award-winning St. Paul’s L’Amoreaux Centre.

St. Paul’s continues to address the needs of our community and wholeheartedly provides programs to families, youth, seniors, children and newcomers. They have also worked hard to promote a sense of community among residents to encourage and drive involvement.

The diversity of the parish, with those in attendance coming from many cultural and ethnic backgrounds, is a looking glass into the whole of Scarborough–Agincourt.

The contributions of St. Paul’s church are integral to making Scarborough–Agincourt a great place to set roots, raise a family and do business.

I extend my best wishes for success in their mission, and I look forward to working with them for many years to come.

EVENTS IN KINGSTON AND THE ISLANDS

Mr. Ian Arthur: It’s a pleasure to rise during this festive season, and I know many people in Kingston and the Islands are looking forward to getting to spend time

with their friends and family. It's a community that has many, many events in the season. I'll just run through a couple of them.

On November 30, downtown Kingston will once again host Festive Friday, an event featuring many downtown businesses, a photo booth with Mr. and Mrs. Claus, and drag queen gift-wrapping in support of Kingston Pride.

We have the Lumina Borealis light show, between the 30th of November and January 5, at the Fort Henry National Historic Site.

The internationally acclaimed National Ballet Theatre of Odessa, Ukraine is bringing The Nutcracker on the 5th and 6th.

On the 6th to the 9th, Artfest Kingston Christmas Art and Craft Show will be at the Kingston 1000 Islands Sportsplex.

The Wolfe Island Santa Claus parade is on December 8.

I had the pleasure of attending the Kingston Santa Claus parade last night. I had a great time. I was dressed as Buddy the Elf. It was a lot of fun.

On December 9, stop by the outdoor Christmas market on Sydenham Street, truly a one-of-a-kind event inspired by European outdoor markets.

Our ongoing holiday market runs in the building at the corner of Brock and Wellington through till December 22.

These are just a few of the many, many events that are happening in my riding. I encourage everyone in Kingston to get out and be a part of this holiday season.

I want to wish everyone in Kingston and the Islands a safe, joyful and happy holiday season.

CAREERS DAY

Ms. Natalia Kusendova: I was thrilled to participate in careers day at Holy Name of Mary College all-girls school in Mississauga this past Friday. Standing before 60 young women, grades 9 to 12, I had the privilege of sharing my story.

I spoke about my experience of immigrating to Canada as a 12-year-old and being raised by a hard-working single mom. I spoke about the path that led me to become an ER registered nurse, to help patients navigate through the most tragic of health circumstances. And finally, we had a little politics one-on-one fun, talking about the different levels of government and what a day in the life of an MPP looks like.

I also learned about some of the independent projects that these young women are working on, including Dream, a student who started a non-profit that repurposes infant incubators to be sent to developing countries, and Alessia, a student who started an initiative to enhance education for young girls and women. I was truly inspired to hear these students' ideas and to have a discussion not only about our political system but also about the importance of faith and Catholic education.

Looking back, having female leaders, such as Marie Sklodowska Curie or our very own ministers, Christine Elliott and Laurie Scott, to look up to for inspiration was a major driver which propelled me to where I am today, and I am truly grateful.

Mr. Speaker, it was an immense privilege to have had the opportunity to share my story and learn from these young women. With such bright leaders of tomorrow, I am confident that our future is in good hands.

SPECIAL-NEEDS CHILDREN

Mrs. Daisy Wai: I am a mother of four children. But I have been serving at a special-needs group for more than 10 years. I always give applause to all the parents who are taking care of special-needs children. Whether they are just one child in a family, or two children, it is really draining for those parents.

I had the honour of going to visit Reena, which is in Richmond Hill. I toured their site and I'm really impressed by how many people are coming together in the community to help families and to help children with autistic challenges. Last week, I was at the Reena gala. Also, on Sunday I was in the Chinese community where they have the Under the Banyan Tree Centre. Together, these support autistic children.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to encourage our House to see that need also. I'm thankful that our government is already investing \$1.9 billion, and matching up with the federal government for \$3.8 billion to support the special-needs as well as the mental health communities. Way to go. We continue to support them, and my heart goes out to them.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnett): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments, dated November 27, 2018, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

RIGHT TO TIMELY MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH ACT, 2018 LOI DE 2018 SUR LE DROIT DES ENFANTS ET DES JEUNES À DES SOINS DE SANTÉ MENTALE ET AU TRAITEMENT DE LA TOXICOMANIE EN TEMPS OPPORTUN

Ms. Karpoche moved first reading of the following bill:
Bill 63, An Act to enact the Right to Timely Mental Health and Addiction Care for Children and Youth Act, 2018 / Projet de loi 63, Loi édictant la Loi de 2018 sur le droit des enfants et des jeunes à des soins de santé mentale et au traitement de toxicomanies en temps opportun.

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

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Would the member for Parkdale–High Park care to explain her bill?

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: Children and youth across Ontario experience mental health and addiction issues that impact their lives and the lives of those around them. Prioritizing child and youth mental health and addiction services is the right and fiscally responsible thing to do.

Early interventions are more effective in addressing health issues. Guaranteeing access to mental health and addiction services within 30 days will provide children and youth the support they need in a timely manner and will enable them to grow and to live their lives to the fullest.

This bill enacts the Right to Timely Mental Health and Addiction Care for Children and Youth Act, 2018. The act requires the minister to ensure that a person who is less than 26 years old, resides in Ontario and has been deemed to require a mental health or addiction service receives access to the required mental health or addiction service within 30 days of being deemed to require the service.

1520

PETITIONS

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ms. Bhutla Karpoche: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, as a community, have not been consulted at all by our current provincial government regarding revisions to social assistance that will come after completion of the government’s ‘100-day review.’ As a result of our exclusion in this decision-making process, scheduled to end Nov. 8, any changes that are made to our social assistance programs will not include input from the very people who are at their very core, know the most and are the most affected by these programs. Our government can and must do better;

“Whereas members of our community were consulted on recommendations to forming a clear path forward to social assistance and income security reform. These recommendations were put forward October 2017 in *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*. They spelled our truths, addressed some of the most difficult corners of the system, while still staying very conservative in terms of the proposed” rates. “Regardless, we were still going to be well below the poverty line for a while;

“Whereas before the June 2018 elections, the Liberal government passed several recommendations from or inspired by the Roadmap, including 19 improvements to the ODSP and OW that were to start this fall. On July 31, 2018, Minister MacLeod announced that the rate increases would be cut to a one-time, across-the-board ‘compassionate’ increase of 1.5%, and the 19 improvements were ‘on

pause,’ pending the ‘100-day review’ on which our community has not been consulted;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reinstate all 19 improvements to ODSP and OW on which our community was consulted, including, but not limited to:

“—3% increase to basic needs and shelter rates;

“—2% increase to other allowances;

“—changing the definition of ‘spouse’—from three months of cohabitation to three years (as per family law);

“—replacing the board and lodge rate with full basic benefits;

“—doubling of the ODSP/OW earning exemption and reducing OW waiting period;

“—full exemptions of TFSAs, RRSPs, gifts and voluntary payments;

“—fully exempting in ODSP, payments from trusts or life insurance policies;

“—expansion of remote communities allowance;

“—allowing dependent adults to get OW on their own when living with family due to lack of” affordable “housing.”

I fully support this petition and will be affixing my signature to it, as well.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Jill Andrew: I rise to share this petition on behalf of the residents of Toronto–St. Paul’s.

“Petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

“Don’t Take Away Our \$15 Minimum Wage and Fairer Labour Laws.

“Whereas the vast majority of Ontarians support a \$15 minimum wage and better laws to protect workers; and

“Whereas last year, in response to overwhelming popular demand by the people of Ontario, the provincial government brought in legislation and regulations that:

“Deliver 10 personal emergency leave days for all workers, the first two of which are paid;

“Make it illegal to pay part-time, temporary, casual or contract workers less than their full-time or directly hired co-workers, including equal public holiday pay and vacation pay;

“Raised the adult general minimum wage to \$14 per hour and further raises it to a \$15 minimum wage on January 1, 2019, with annual adjustments by Ontario’s consumer price index;

“Make it easier to join unions, especially for workers in the temporary help, home care, community services and building services sectors;

“Protect workers’ employment status, pay and benefits when contracts are flipped or businesses are sold in the building services sector;

“Make client companies responsible for workplace health and safety for temporary agency employees;

“Provide strong enforcement through the hiring of an additional 175 employment standards officers; and

“Will ensure workers have modest improvements in the scheduling of their hours, including:

“—three hours’ pay when workers are expected to be on call all day, but are not called into work;

“—three hours’ pay for any employee whose shift is cancelled with less than two days’ notice; and

“—the right to refuse shifts without penalty if the shift is scheduled with fewer than four days’ notice;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to honour these commitments, including the \$15 minimum wage and fairer scheduling rules set to take effect on January 1, 2019. We further call on the assembly to take all necessary steps to enforce these laws and extend them to ensure no worker is left without protection.”

I proudly affix my signature to these hundreds of signatures, and I hand it to my page, Emily, for filing.

INJURED WORKERS

Mr. Kevin Yarde: This petition is 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 fully endorse this petition and give it to page Kejsi.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the province of Ontario requires a minimum but no maximum temperature in long-term-care homes;

“Whereas temperatures that are too hot can cause emotional and physical distress that may contribute to a decline in a frail senior’s health;

“Whereas front-line staff in long-term-care homes also suffer when trying to provide care under these conditions

with headaches, tiredness, signs of hyperthermia, which directly impacts resident/patient care;

“Whereas Ontario’s bill of rights for residents of Ontario nursing homes states ‘every resident has the right to be properly sheltered ... in a manner consistent with his or her needs’;

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

“Direct the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations amending O. Reg. 79/10 in the Long-Term Care Homes Act to establish a maximum temperature in Ontario’s long-term-care homes.”

I fully support the petition, sign it and give it to page Kidan to deliver to the table.

INJURED WORKERS

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: “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 agree with this petition and will be affixing my signature to it and passing it to page Ella to take to the Clerk.

1530

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This petition is entitled “Stop the Cuts to Indigenous Reconciliation.”

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario is situated on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples, many of whom have been on this land for at least 12,000 years;

“Whereas in 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report: ‘Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future’ which made 94 recommendations or ‘Calls to Action’ for the government of Canada;

“Whereas reconciliation must be at the centre of all government decision-making;

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

“—continue reconciliation work in Ontario by implementing the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission;

“—reinstate the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation;

“—work with First Nations leaders to sign co-operative government-to-government accords;

“—support TRC education and community development (e.g. TRC summer writing sessions);

“—support Indigenous communities across the province (e.g. cleaning up Grassy Narrows).”

I support the petition, will be affixing my signature to it and giving it to page Hannah.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Ian Arthur: I have a petition today from the ODSP Action Coalition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we, as a community, have not been consulted at all by our current provincial government regarding revisions to social assistance that will come after completion of the government’s ‘100-day review.’ As a result of our exclusion in this decision-making process, scheduled to end Nov. 8, any changes that are made to our social assistance programs will not include input from the very people who are at their very core, know the most and are the most affected by these programs. Our government can and must do better;

“Whereas members of our community were consulted on recommendations to forming a clear path forward to social assistance and income security reform. These recommendations were put forward October 2017 in Income Security: A Roadmap for Change. They spelled our truths, addressed some of the most difficult corners of the system, while still staying very conservative in terms of the proposed rate increases (3 x 5% over the next three years for ODSP; 10%, 7% and 5% for OW). Regardless, we were still going to be well below the poverty line for a while;

“Whereas before the June 2018 elections, the Liberal government passed several recommendations from or inspired by the Roadmap, including 19 improvements to the ODSP and OW that were to start this fall. On July 31, 2018, Minister MacLeod announced that the rate increases would be cut to a one-time, across-the-board ‘compassionate’ increase of 1.5%, and the 19 improvements were ‘on pause,’ pending the ‘100-day review’ on which our community has not been consulted;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reinstate all 19 improvements to ODSP and OW on which our community was consulted, including, but not limited to:

“—3% increase to basic needs and shelter rates;

“—2% increase to other allowances;

“—changing the definition of ‘spouse’—from three months of cohabitation to three years (as per family law);

“—replacing the board and lodge rate with full basic benefits;

“—doubling of the ODSP/OW earning exemption and reducing OW waiting period;

“—full exemptions of TFSAs, RRSPs, gifts and voluntary payments;

“—fully exempting in ODSP, payments from trusts or life insurance policies;

“—expansion of remote communities allowance;

“—allowing dependent adults to get OW on their own when living with family due to lack of housing.”

I support this petition, I will affix my name to it and give it to page Nidhi to be given to the Clerks.

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Ms. Jessica Bell: “The TTC Belongs to Toronto: One Fare. One System. One TTC.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the TTC has owned, operated and maintained Toronto’s public transit system since 1921; and

“Whereas the people of Toronto have paid for the TTC at the fare box and through their property taxes; and

“Whereas uploading the subway will mean higher fares, reduced service and less say for transit riders; and

“Whereas the TTC is accountable to the people of Toronto because elected Toronto city councillors sit on its board;

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

“Reject legislation that uploads any aspect of the TTC to the province of Ontario, and reject the privatization or contracting out of any part of the TTC.”

I fully support this petition. I’m putting my name to it and I’m giving it to page Emily.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This petition is about affordable housing, and I would like to thank Sam Trosow for signing it and bringing it forward.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas for families throughout much of Ontario, owning a home they can afford remains a dream, while renting is painfully expensive;

“Whereas consecutive Conservative and Liberal governments have sat idle, while housing costs spiralled out of control, speculators made fortunes, and too many families had to put their hopes on hold;

“Whereas every Ontarian should have access to safe, affordable housing. Whether a family wants to rent or

own, live in a house, an apartment, a condominium or a co-op, they should have affordable options;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to immediately prioritize the repair of Ontario’s social housing stock, commit to building new affordable homes, crack down on housing speculators, and make rentals more affordable through rent controls and updated legislation.”

I fully support this petition, sign it and give it to page Aditya to deliver to the table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 27, 2018, on the amendment to the motion for time allocation of the following bill:

Bill 57, An Act to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi 57, Loi édictant, modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Again, it’s a pleasure to be able to rise and speak to this very, very important motion today.

When I last spoke to this—earlier this morning before question period—I was at the point where I wanted to talk about how important it is for a government to have a plan, because we’ve seen in the past what happens when a government comes forward during difficult economic times and doesn’t have a plan. Progressive Conservatives have unfortunately been put in this position before. I say “unfortunately” because it’s the people of Ontario who really suffer when governments don’t have a plan.

I look back at that time when Mike Harris was elected back in 1995 and the situation that the Progressive Conservative government faced at that time, not unlike what we face today. It was a time, of course, when we had assumed office after what could only be described as five of the most disastrous years of governance in the province of Ontario. Of course, that was the previous Bob Rae NDP administration, Mr. Speaker. That truly had to be one of the most difficult times and periods in the province’s history. A million people were out of work and on social assistance. They had left the people of Ontario with a massive budget deficit.

What was bad about that time period is that not only were all the economic indicators a disaster as left by Bob Rae and that NDP government; it had become clear they had absolutely no vision, no plan, to deal with the economic situation. They started off one way, but two years into their mandate they had realized that they were going to have a difficult time. So what did Bob Rae and the NDP government do? Without a plan, they decided, after they had gone and met with people whom they were borrowing money from, and these people said they were no longer going to lend Ontario money unless fundamental changes

were made—they started to react very quickly, but in a disastrous way.

So what did they do? They didn’t look at modernizing health care; they closed hospital beds. That’s what they did, Mr. Speaker: They closed hospital beds. They still left the people of Ontario with massive debt.

Talk about attacking workers’ rights. We’ve heard a lot about workers over the last couple of days, as well we should have, after what has gone on in Oshawa. But everybody, of course, remembers Rae days. It is something that you constantly hear about, the Rae days.

I know that there are not a lot of members on the opposite side who were part of that government—there are not a lot of them left, Mr. Speaker—but it was truly one of the most difficult times, and the government of Ontario, the government of Mike Harris, had to do something very quickly, not only to resolve the issues that had been left behind by Bob Rae, Mr. Speaker, but you will recall that shortly after that there was, of course, a Liberal federal government.

1540

The Liberal federal government decided that what they were going to do was to attack the province of Ontario even further. They made the decision—I think it was in 1996, but I could be wrong; either 1996 or 1997—to unilaterally slash transfers to the province of Ontario to the tune of billions of dollars. I know some of the members on our side were here for that. So not only did the province of Ontario have to deal with a massive deficit that was left behind by the NDP; we then had to deal with a shortfall in transfers that the Chrétien/Martin regime was leaving to the province of Ontario.

What did that mean for us, Mr. Speaker? That could have been a devastating hit to the province of Ontario. It meant that we had to make up for shortfalls in funding for health care. We had to make up for shortfalls in funding for transportation. We had to bring down taxes for our small businesses. We had to make investments in our communities, in transit and transportation, all in the context of billions of dollars in debt left behind by Bob Rae and the NDP government and billions of dollars in transfer cuts that were the hallmark of the federal Liberal government.

But the Harris government did it. They were able to cut taxes. They were able to make important investments, a \$20-billion investment at the time, bringing back investment in infrastructure through what was called the SuperBuild fund. At a time when the federal Liberal government had extracted themselves or removed themselves from funding infrastructure, the Ontario government was able to move back into it and create a SuperBuild fund in 1999, investing \$20 billion in opening up transit and transportation, and really launched a period where governments decided that it was the right thing to do, to start reinvesting in infrastructure. We were able to balance the budget, Mr. Speaker, and cut taxes. We increased funding for hospitals. We transformed education funding—a program, the education funding formula, which is still in place today.

But fast-forward to this year, and really to the last couple of years in the province of Ontario. Fast-forward,

and what we had was a Liberal government that had been in office for far too long, and they were really in office because they were supported so often by the NDP. I know my friends in the NDP hate to hear this. They hate to hear how for so long they supported the Liberal government. Of course, you know, Mr. Speaker, that the Liberal-NDP coalition was in power for 15 years in the province of Ontario.

That Liberal/NDP coalition is responsible now for leaving the people of Ontario a deficit of \$15 billion, a legacy of debt that is absolutely stunning—\$350 billion of debt. That's what a Liberal-NDP coalition has meant to the people of Ontario. It has meant schools that are overcrowded. It has meant schools that were closed in a lot of rural areas; despite the promises of the Liberal-NDP coalition, some 600 schools were closed because of their inability to make proper investments. It meant increases in taxes for Ontario businesses. It meant increases in taxes for individuals.

The Liberal-NDP coalition's inability to budget appropriately has left our transfer partners in municipalities without the ability to fund and invest in their infrastructure. It left communities such as mine and those of my colleagues with outdated infrastructure and an inability to get themselves to their jobs. It left communities desperate for broadband. It left communities without natural gas expansion.

What it really meant for the people of Ontario, the Liberal-NDP coalition, was not only a legacy of debt that will be paid for by the next generation—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Order, please.

Mr. Paul Calandra: I know sometimes people don't want to hear this. I know they don't want to hear it, but Mr. Speaker, it's fine. Do you know what? I know the member for Niagara Centre—I think it's Niagara Centre—said yesterday that he didn't care, because he might not be here in 10 years; he's getting to that age. But do you know what? The people who come here—my kids, the ones who are in the galleries today—actually care, because do you know what? They're paying for our bills. So thank you very much, next generation, and the next generation and the generation after that. The Liberal-NDP coalition of the last 15 years have left you with fewer schools. It's left you with a health care system that needs to be changed. It's left you with two-and-a-half-hour drives into jobs in Toronto from Markham. But, hey, don't worry about it, because according to the Liberal and NDP coalition across the way, it doesn't matter. We can continue to borrow. We can continue to ask for more from the people of Ontario. I'm sure they expect that the next generation will have all kinds of money in their pockets, and they don't have to worry about it. Well, Mr. Speaker, the people I talk to in my riding actually care about it.

Interjection.

Mr. Paul Calandra: No.

I actually had the fortune last week of going to speak to grade 5 students at a school in my riding. We separated

ourselves into a mini Parliament in the classroom. It was two classes, and we separated ourselves into a mini Parliament. They were a wonderful class. They knew who the Premier was. They knew who the Leader of the Opposition was. They knew that the Liberal-NDP coalition was smaller than it had been in the last Parliament. We asked them, "What do you want to debate?" The number one thing that they talked about—after the debate on eliminating homework for the class for the rest of the year ended—was debt and deficit, how much they would have to pay. And they were concerned. They were concerned. They saw this grey-haired guy in their classroom talking about all the good things we're doing, and they wondered, "Is there going to be anything left for us in the future?" I take that seriously. I take it seriously.

There are many communities that have concerns across this province. We are seeing that interest rates are increasing. The jobs that were created by the Liberal-NDP coalition certainly aren't the types of jobs that we on this side of the House and Conservatives who occupy that side of the House think are the jobs of the future, but we're making changes. We're making appropriate investments to make sure that we have the jobs of the future.

Mr. Speaker, when a party or a government, such as the last Liberal-NDP coalition government, budget without a plan, this is what happens. The people of Ontario come to the Progressive Conservatives—and we're grateful that they came to us. It is an honour to us to be able to have been called upon by the people of the province to come in and fix things yet again, to fix what was a disastrous decade and a half of darkness of the Liberal-NDP coalition government.

That's why we have brought forward a plan, because it's important to plan, colleagues. My colleagues on this side of the House know. We can talk about all the things that we heard during the election. I know my colleagues opposite heard the same things, because do you know what, Mr. Speaker? It's not just people who live in my community who are concerned about paying their bills. It's not just the people in Markham-Stouffville or Richmond Hill who worry about heating or eating. It's not just people in my riding. We're hearing it constantly. In fact, the member from Timmins talks often about the high cost of energy in his own riding, the high cost of gas. So we know, colleagues, that the members across also have the same worries.

We have heard about roads and infrastructure—the lack of roads and infrastructure in some parts of the north. We hear those complaints. As a government, we want to be able to react, and we want to be able to make those investments. That's why we have come forward with a plan. Now, that plan started from day one, Mr. Speaker. You'll know this, and I know how much you appreciate a good plan, Mr. Speaker. It came in with looking at where were our books, where was the government, what position were we in—because the Liberal and NDP coalition had done a masterful job of not really telling the people of Ontario where we were at, and we had to know. The Auditor General was telling us one thing. The Financial Accountability Officer was telling us something. They were telling

us that the books didn't add up, that the debts of the people of Ontario were much greater than was being presented to the people of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, that is a huge problem. It is a huge problem. Now we can do one of two things. We can ignore it, or we can fix it—and that's what this government has chosen to do. We started off right away. We brought the Legislature back, and we heard howls from the opposition. The former Liberal-NDP coalition members were just upset that they had to work all summer. But so be it; we had to get down to work. We had to figure out where the province's finances were. The minister of the Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance put together the financial transparency. We looked at a line-by-line audit to see where we were at and we got moving right away.

1550

The Minister of Health immediately got moving to transform our health care system. We know that there are challenges, and we know that you have to make investments if you're going to improve the health care system, because those in the generations over the next little bit will require either long-term care or health care, so we have to make those changes.

The Minister of Finance has been working hard, of course, with all of the colleagues on this side of the House.

On day one, the Premier challenged our entire caucus—and, frankly, the entire Legislative Assembly—to find ways to make Ontario open for business, to look at ways that we could cut red tape, to look at ways to encourage businesses to set up shop in the province of Ontario, to encourage existing businesses to expand and grow their operations. We've been completely seized with that at a time, of course, when we were facing challenges with our neighbours to the south and the renegotiation of the free trade agreement.

Our red-tape discussions, of course, were led very ably by the member for Aurora–Oak Ridges–Richmond Hill and the member for Flamborough—the entire riding escapes me. It's Flamborough—

Ms. Donna Skelly: Glanbrook.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Glanbrook.

They did a double team with respect to red tape and our free trade agreement. They criss-crossed the province. They sat down with members of Parliament across the province. They went into opposition-held territories, because in opposition ridings, you know what? Their small businesses were hurting as well. We heard from them the impact of high hydro rates. So they did that. Our caucus contributed to those discussions, and what did we hear? We heard that red tape is killing opportunity. We have to do something about it, so part of our plan is about killing red tape.

We heard that labour legislation which the NDP and Liberal coalition brought forward was not only killing jobs, was not only killing investment by our small, medium and large job creators, but was doing irreparable harm to the people they said they wanted to take care of. Thankfully, the Minister of Labour worked with our colleagues, worked with labour groups, did massive

consultations in a very short period of time, and came forward with a piece of legislation that will open up Ontario for business and protect the workers we want to be protected.

The opposition talks about minimum wage. I can assure you that on this side of the House, there's not one member of Parliament that wants to see—on this side, on the Conservative side, anyway, we don't rejoice in anybody making a minimum wage. It's not our goal to create a minimum wage economy. That's not our goal, and anybody who suggests or fights for a minimum wage economy is just throwing in the towel. What we're trying to do is create jobs for tomorrow so that people can support their families, so that we can support the services that matter to the people of Ontario. That's why we've brought forward that important piece of legislation, but it is part of the plan.

The Minister of Energy and this entire caucus, I can tell you—from day one in caucus, it has been a very vigorous debate from our entire caucus that we had to do something about runaway energy costs. We had to do something about this, because this was probably the greatest disincentive for families to invest in themselves, in their families, in their small businesses and in their own retirements. We had to do something.

We were hearing stories—all of us heard stories, not just members on this side of the House. I know we all heard stories about how difficult it was for people across this province to make ends meet, especially in the winter, so the Minister of Energy, with the support of our caucus, brought forward some very, very important reforms. It wasn't just about firing an out-of-control board that seemed to worry more about their own personal compensation than the people of the province of Ontario. It wasn't just about that. It was about cancelling contracts for projects that we didn't need for high-cost energy. We started out by doing that.

But it's another part of the plan: cutting red tape, looking at our energy costs, looking at our health care, investing in long-term care, looking at how we can revitalize our acute care health system, part of the plan that we have been bringing together; working with our transfer partners and municipalities—I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has been doing just that since day one as well. We brought forward some very, very important legislation for the city of Toronto, and we did it quickly, to respond to what was a very important situation.

You've heard me talk about this constantly, Mr. Speaker. I spoke about it in the context of the debate on the City of Toronto Act. The city of Toronto demands to be—it is our most important city. It is the financial hub not only of the province of Ontario, but the entire country. When the city of Toronto doesn't work, then the rest of the province and the country are in trouble. When the city of Toronto can't meet infrastructure needs, then you know what? It impacts the member for Richmond Hill; it impacts me; it impacts ridings around. A farmer in Parry Sound or a farmer in Oxford needs to get their supplies to market; they need to have access to roads, but the city of Toronto was blocking that. We worked quickly in order to make

those changes. I'm very confident that, working with Mayor Tory, we will be able to see important investments in transit and transportation that have sat idle for a very, very long time.

I have the member for Milton sitting beside me in this House. We worked together in Ottawa for a number of years, and he was the parliamentary secretary to both the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the minister of trade in Ottawa. But what he has also done is he recognized the fact, and very quickly, that in the province of Ontario, people were paying exorbitant rates for insurance because the Liberal-NDP coalition had messed this up so badly over the last 15 years and were unable to solve the problem. Of course, it was our member, the member for Milton, who worked quickly to make sure we had a bill that we could bring forward to put more money back in the pockets of our drivers.

But it wasn't just about auto insurance. It was about our environment—again, part of the plan. The Minister of the Environment brought forward some important changes to eliminate the cap-and-trade and carbon tax scheme that was, of course, brought in by the Liberal-NDP coalition, which saw the price of everything increase. Imagine an economic plan brought forward by the Liberal-NDP coalition that increased hydro rates to the highest level in North America at a time when people were begging them not to do it and, on top of that, put a carbon tax on drivers, a carbon tax on anybody who went to buy groceries. If you were a driver, you paid an extra tax. If you heated your home, you paid an extra tax—completely unsustainable.

We heard this from resident after resident after resident, small, medium and large job creators, individuals whose doors we knocked on: that they could not support this. Now we're seeing around the world that in other jurisdictions that have implemented the carbon tax, they are fighting back as well because they have realized that it is a disaster for their economies. Individuals cannot support it. It's disastrous for farmers. It's disastrous for our business, small, medium and large job creators. That's why they have pulled back.

The Minister of the Environment is bringing forward some very important changes very soon that will not only meet our environmental targets, but will do it in a way that doesn't harm the very people that we rely on to help fund all of the programs that we find so important: health, education, social assistance, the vital aspects of what we do so we can have a clean environment, we can have job creators succeeding, we can bring investment back to the province and we can still meet our targets.

I mentioned earlier the high cost of energy. There's a bill that hopefully we'll be continuing debate on later on today or in the future with respect to natural gas and making it more available to communities across this province. Not only is hydro expensive, but when you don't have access to anything else, then clearly you are in deep trouble. Members on this side of the House have fought tooth and nail to make it a priority of our government. Not just something we talk about, not just some fancy ideology, as we saw with the Liberal-NDP coalition, but actually getting things done, getting natural gas to the homes so

that our farmers could cut their costs by thousands of dollars.

1600

Imagine the difference it makes to a homeowner in a riding that finally gets natural gas. They can turn off electricity—not turn it off, but they can start heating their home with natural gas as opposed to electricity. That's hundreds of dollars in their pocket. It's another part of what we're doing.

The member for Scarborough–Agincourt was in the House earlier today and he talked about an important community service agency in his riding. I know he has been not only an advocate for agencies within his own riding, but he has truly been an inspiration to a lot of us for a lot of years. He has always been somebody who has fought for the less fortunate people, not only in his own riding but as a source of information for all of us.

When he talks about the social services agencies within his community, it's all of us. We all have these agencies that are very, very important to us, and we could do one of two things: We could continue on the path that was set up for us by the Liberal-NDP coalition and have nothing to provide them into the future, or we could guarantee a stable future going forward by getting our house in order, and that's what we've done.

The member for Scarborough–Agincourt, I can tell you, is a fierce advocate for transit and transportation in his community, because it is harming his ability, his constituents' ability, to find jobs, to find employment, to bring economic activity. I can tell you there are few more fierce advocates for transit and transportation than the member for Scarborough–Agincourt. As fierce an advocate as there is for auto insurance reform in the member from Milton, the member for Scarborough–Agincourt has been as fierce in that.

The member for Carleton talks about our farming and how important our farmers are. The reason why farmers are important is because, as the Minister of Agriculture has highlighted, farming is an incredibly important economic activity in the province of Ontario. I can't confirm, but perhaps only second to culture—perhaps only second to culture. I know the Minister of Culture is also working very hard to make sure that we have the appropriate level of investments available for the future.

It's all part of a plan that we are bringing together to really not only bring the budget back into balance in the province of Ontario—because I'm sure everybody would agree that that's what has to happen. I'm sure when we looked at the plan, when people saw and the minister rose in the House, we all had to be somewhat saddened by the fact that Ontario, a former engine of Confederation, had hit a debt-to-GDP ratio of over 40%. How do we go home, as legislators, and say to our families and our children and our grandchildren that what we're going to give you is a province that is more in debt than any other jurisdiction in the world and that has a worse balance sheet than Greece? We're not going to do that.

We've also heard that the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities has brought some very important

reforms forward with respect to the College of Trades, and what she has done is she eliminated it. Why did we eliminate the College of Trades? Because we've heard a couple of things: It's not working for people who want to get into the trades, it has reduced the availability of apprentices; But what it has also done, and we have seen this—the policies of the Liberal-NDP coalition have created a housing crisis across the province of Ontario, and the GTA prices have gotten so high that it has become unaffordable. More people are moving away from the city, taking even longer to get to jobs in communities that don't have broadband access, that don't have natural gas access, because there's a housing crisis in the centres of commerce. We're moving to change that.

So the College of Trades, part of it is not only about getting more people into the trades; it's also about reducing the costs—reducing costs so that it's more affordable to build houses across the province of Ontario. Again, as I said, it is part of a plan.

I spoke very briefly, and I just want to talk a little bit more, about broadband access.

You know how fond I am of my hometown of Stouffville, Mr. Speaker. I represent two beautiful communities: part of Markham and all of Stouffville.

Markham is a city of some 350,000 people, but there are parts of Markham without broadband Internet. On the border of Canada's largest city, we have communities without broadband Internet access. We have full swaths in the northern part of Stouffville with a similar problem.

We're hearing from the new mayor of Stouffville. I'll just sidetrack a bit. We're very excited by the prospect. We have a brand new mayor, and we're able to turn the page on what was a very difficult last four years in our community. We have a new mayor. There's a lot of excitement around what is coming forward.

One of the things he talked to me about was this: "Paul, we have to resolve this issue with broadband Internet access." We can't, on the one hand, ask people to work from home, and ask small, medium and large job creators to change how the working patterns are, so that more people can work from home, if they can't actually do it. We can't encourage businesses to come to our community if we don't have access to high-speed Internet.

You would think, after 15 years, that the Liberal-NDP coalition would have had some ideas on how to do that—but nothing. Nothing. They had nothing, colleagues. When you look back at the totality of the last 15 years of the Liberal-NDP coalition—I think Ontarians will look back and say, "the former Premier"—not to stray too far, but there has been one NDP government in the history of this province—one. One NDP government. They were given one chance to govern this province, and the people have never, ever returned them again.

In Ottawa, where I was a federal member of Parliament, they've never been given the responsibility. In fact, the former NDP Premier was so embarrassed to be an NDP Premier that he joined the Liberal Party. He ran out of town and joined the Liberal Party, Mr. Speaker. He was so embarrassed by his administration that he thought, "Let

me join another party, and hopefully nobody will remember the disaster that was the NDP government."

I know that members on this side of the House and members on that side look back at that time and say, "My gosh, what the heck happened over those last five years?" It's only to be matched by the Liberal-NDP coalition of the last 15 years. What did they accomplish outside of high debt, Mr. Speaker? Not a heck of a lot for the people of the province of Ontario.

Now it is our job. It is our job. We open up, of course, our arms to reasonable members of the opposition who want to join with us. If you believe, Mr. Speaker, the way I do, that putting more money into the pockets of people is a good thing, then I hope that you will join with us. If you believe that balancing a budget so that future generations don't have to pay for some of our mistakes—I know that our side of the House will be focused on this, but I hope that the members of the Liberal-NDP party now will join with us.

When we talk about expanding broadband access, I hope that they will join with us. When the Minister of Health talks about improving long-term care, I hope that they will join with us. When the Minister of Agriculture talks about unleashing unlimited opportunity for our farmers, I hope that they will join with us. When the minister for seniors talks about bringing seniors in as part of the discussion on everything we do going forward, I hope that they will join with us.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on much longer. I do thank you for your indulgence, but with that, I move that the debate be adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Mr. Calandra has moved adjournment of the debate.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no. I heard him say "carry." I guess someone over here said "no."

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1610 to 1640.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Mr. Calandra has moved adjournment of the debate.

All those in favour will please rise and remain standing until recorded by the Clerk.

All those opposed will please rise and remain standing until recorded by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 15; the nays are 53.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I declare the motion lost.

Ms. Thompson has moved an amendment to government notice of motion number 20 relating to allocation of time on Bill 57, An Act to enact, amend and repeal various statutes. Is it the pleasure of the House that Ms. Thompson's amendment carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

However, “Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the amendment to government notice of motion 20 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, November 28.” This was given to me, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, signed by Lorne Coe, MPP and chief government whip of the Progressive Conservative Party.

Vote deferred.

ACCESS TO NATURAL GAS ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 SUR L'ACCÈS AU GAZ NATUREL

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 22, 2018, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 32, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998 / Projet de loi 32, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate? I recognize the member from Toronto–Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. I will be sharing my time with the member for Oshawa. She generously allowed me to have a few minutes to speak to this bill.

Speaker, you may well have read this bill. You're a literate man. I know you like to read legislation in your spare time so you've gone through this, but for all those out there who may not have read this bill, just a few notes about what's in the bill that we're debating this afternoon.

Bill 32 requires the Ontario Energy Board to set up a rate protection program for certain natural gas consumers to cover the additional costs of making prescribed qualifying investments to expand natural gas infrastructure to those consumers.

Speaker, in plain language, that allows the Ontario Energy Board to approve plans to subsidize the cost of natural gas lines to new houses, or existing houses that aren't currently served by natural gas. Now, what's interesting is that when this project started out, it was supposed to be oriented towards rural and northern customers, people in towns and regions where historically it hadn't been economic to provide a natural gas supply. What's been interesting in watching the evolution of this issue is that in this bill, there is no reference to rural or northern communities whatsoever—not one word. In fact, in the debate on this bill, the NDP brought forward a motion that the purpose of the relevant section of the bill would be “to facilitate the rational expansion of natural gas distribution systems to rural, northern and on-reserve consumers, while protecting the interests of consumers with respect to prices and the reliability and quality of gas service.”

We actually think that serving rural, northern, remote communities and reserves makes sense. It has to happen within a context that I'll address as I go on in my commentary. But what makes one really cautious, when you look at the bill as written and as unamended, is that this bill could be used to provide natural gas service to new suburban subdivisions built on the outskirts of cities, thus

making it cheaper for developers to provide that service, reducing their costs, but not actually providing service to the people that we've talked about so much as we've gone through this issue: rural, northern and remote communities.

So you have to ask, what's going on here? When the whole idea of this support for natural gas infrastructure to rural areas came forward a number of years ago, it was the Ontario Federation of Agriculture that was down here regularly saying, “We need this.” As you're well aware, Speaker, in your riding and just outside your riding, there are quite a few operations that could benefit from an expansion of the natural gas system.

But what we have now is something that is not explicitly directed toward those rural, northern and remote communities. The Ontario Home Builders' Association was the organization that came to validate this bill, to back up the government. It makes me and many others ask the question, where exactly is this program headed? Because if it's not there for rural, northern, remote and Indigenous communities, who exactly will it serve? I think it is reasonable to be skeptical, it's reasonable to be suspicious that, in fact, the purpose of this bill will be very different from that which has been advertised for a long time.

The interesting thing here, which many people out there with their natural gas bills in hand today won't be aware of, is that existing natural gas consumers would fund the expansion program by higher natural gas rates. So if you're in Windsor–Tecumseh and you're in one of the houses on a side street and you're paying your natural gas bill today, you may not be aware that you will be paying a higher natural gas bill in order to subsidize suburban developers in their efforts. Good point, eh, Speaker?

There are a lot of people in this province who are paying their natural gas bills now who may not be happy at the thought that they're going to be subsidizing expansion of the system to assist developers, rather than to contribute to making all of Ontario a place where people have access to reasonably priced energy.

In fact, we made an amendment on that—and our critic is here and will speak to this further—saying that the Ontario Energy Board should at least publish the information regarding the impact of these new subsidy charges on their bills to residential customers, so people would know that when their bill came in higher this month than it was last month, they were contributing to a Conservative program to tax them to expand the natural gas system. Now, that was a reasonable amendment, and it was rejected completely by all the Conservative members of the committee considering this bill. So not only will people be paying more to subsidize the expansion of the system, they won't be told how much of their bill is arising from this subsidy program.

I've been around long enough to remember when Conservatives used to jump up and down in their seats when the Liberals were doing such things, and now they seem to be very happy—they seem totally laid-back—at the idea that they will be financing expansion of a system on the backs of residential ratepayers who may not, in fact, have the cash to afford this subsidy. It's not an issue for them.

1650

It's interesting that the government, through its cabinet, will be making a lot of the rules and structures that you'd typically leave to the Ontario Energy Board. That opens the door to all kinds of political decision-making on expansion of the system, rather than having the assessment done by a regulator that has a broad framework of instructions on how to make sure that energy prices and costs are allocated fairly and reasonably to people who use the system. That's gone.

This is a politicization of the natural gas distribution system, which, for a party that calls itself free-market, is quite intriguing. Again, all the things that they condemn the Liberals for, they're happily putting in place now.

It notes in the bill that natural gas distributors would be "entitled to be compensated for ... lost revenue." They put in these lines that are not economic. Residential ratepayers pay more to subsidize those lines, but the companies that put in the lines may not get back all the money they invested. That's an interesting twist. I don't quite understand how that works in Conservative ideology, but it's intriguing to me that the natural gas companies may get dinged by this.

Also intriguing, Speaker, is that the cabinet, the government, will have the ability to determine that certain information would be included with invoices. We tried to block that. We put forward an amendment, and it was a very simple one: that a regulation made in this bill "shall not provide for any partisan advertising on an invoice." I'm surprised that the Conservatives didn't vote in favour of that, because we had a whole issue with the Liberals when they were in government sending out all kinds of partisan messages on our electricity bills. I, as the critic, listened to a lot of the members now on the other side talking about how outrageous this was. They didn't actually get to the point of having a smiling picture of Kathleen Wynne stamped on the envelope, but they might have. They might have, and so it makes sense to me that the government would have sided with the NDP and adopted this amendment.

The fact that they didn't raises questions as to: What exactly are the messages that they'll be putting on the natural gas bills? Will it be Doug Ford on the cover holding a big "open for business" sign, or Doug Ford saying, "You're warm tonight. That's because of me"? All kinds of things: "Your supper was cooked because I had a hand in it." I look forward to that invoice. I know that my colleague tried to strike that down and thought that we'd get a good reception from the Conservatives, but unfortunately she didn't get the support that she needed. She didn't get the support.

Those are some of the things that are in the bill and some of the attempts we made to correct those problems. The other elements in the bill, some of the things that are missing—there were rules in there before this bill came along that the Ontario Energy Board followed, based on the principle that people who benefit from natural gas investment should be the ones to pay for them. Well, that's gone.

It's not clear from this bill whether the Ontario Energy Board will continue to have the authority to review and approve expansions to the natural gas system, which leaves us in the interesting position that the extension of a gas line will depend entirely on the quality of your lobbyist. Did your lobbyist go to high school with Doug Ford or not? If he did, then you've got a good chance of getting a gas line where you want it. If he didn't go to high school with him, you can be sure the Ontario Energy Board will not be in the same position as it was before to make a rational decision on where gas lines would go. Those are concerns.

It's interesting that this bill not only sets up this totally politicized framework; it's also the basis for cutting a \$100-million investment in rural and northern natural gas systems. That whole approach is one that should be troubling.

We've made the argument that if you're going to put forward a proposal for a natural gas line, you should show what the benefits are and what the expenses are. We actually put forward an amendment—my colleague did—asking for a showing of the evidence of the direct or indirect benefits from approving a particular natural gas line. Seems to be reasonable. The public's paying for it. Why shouldn't they be in a position to understand, with numbers, what is being done and being stuck on their bill? That was rejected by the government.

There's no consideration in this bill for looking at the environmental impacts of the expansion. So where you've got a natural gas line that's replacing oil or propane, there are greenhouse gas reduction benefits that should have been accounted for, should be considered, and where it's causing an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, the government is not going to be required to show how that's offset, how that's dealt with. That's a substantial concern, Speaker. That is a substantial concern not addressed in this bill.

I had a chance to speak to this recently when we were talking about the scuttling of the Green Energy Act, to understand what's happened in rural Ontario with heating costs. If people look back into the 1970s or the early 1980s, when Ontario had a big surplus of electrical power, much like it does now, Ontario Hydro was desperately trying to get customers to come on board and buy that power. They had very aggressive programs going out into rural areas, getting homeowners to convert to electric baseboard heaters. The initial deal was very sweet. The capital cost was really low, power was fairly inexpensive, and so rural Ontario was asked to suck up the surplus power.

In the end, it didn't turn out to be a good deal for them. In the end, when the price of power went up, those baseboard heaters, that whole deal, turned out to be really, really expensive. It wasn't a good deal for rural Ontario.

People should be aware that, right now, the natural gas industry, driven by fracking developments in the United States, is floating on this big bubble of gas, and that industry is desperately looking for customers that will suck up all that extra product, because they don't like low

prices. They're not set up as charities; they are set up to make money. They want to make as much as possible. So in the United States they've been pushing for the construction of fertilizer factories. They've been setting up liquefied natural gas export terminals. They are looking for customers globally. They even had Donald Trump going on about why Europe should be buying liquefied natural gas from the United States rather than from Russia. They are looking for customers. Their long-term plan is to have much higher natural gas prices.

The concern for rural Ontario is that people will spend a lot of money on this infrastructure. Customers who are using gas right now will subsidize it a great deal, but in a number of years the price of gas will go up substantially. Rural Ontario will be in the same position as it is now, and that's paying an awful lot for energy.

There's nothing in this bill that would provide for very substantial energy conservation retrofits to rural homes all over Ontario to cut their need for any kind of outside energy. That would actually stabilize their costs going forward, and that's, frankly, something that should have been in this bill and wasn't in this bill.

Speaker, a number of people have weighed in on this bill. As I said earlier, the Ontario Home Builders' Association are happy as clams about this.

Tom Adams weighed in on this bill. Tom's an interesting guy because he's totally a free marketeer. He was the energy consultant for the Conservatives on their energy plan, I think, in the 2014 election, and probably giving advice prior to that. He wrote a blog about this whole bill and its impact. I just want to quote a few things from what he had to say.

"With this legislation," the bill before us, "the Ford [government] is taking over one of the key functions of the Ontario Energy Board—overseeing gas system expansion," and that's right. That is a very slippery road to go down when you stop making decisions based on a rational assessment of need, of cost, of benefit, and start going down the road of making decisions based solely on your political interests and your political benefits.

1700

He notes that, "Politicizing gas system expansion will directly result in higher overall costs, but I believe the indirect costs could be greater than the direct costs." In the future, a government that wants to shift even more onto natural gas bills will be in a position to do that. That's not the direction that you want to be going in. That's hugely problematic.

It's amazing to me that he also said that Kathleen "Wynne's approach to gas expansion looks temperate and well-considered compared to Ford's approach." For those who weren't around for the last six or seven years, to have Tom Adams consider that Kathleen Wynne had done something that was temperate and moderate is an astounding thing to read. I think it will only happen once in the universe, that Tom will like something Kathleen Wynne did, but really, only in relation to what Doug Ford has brought forward. That's an extraordinary thing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I'll apologize for interrupting the member from Danforth. I've been

lenient on you saying the Premier's first and last name. Please, in further reference, refer to him as Premier Ford, the leader of the PC Party or something other than the name that you're giving him. Thank you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, I thank you for that.

I've got a few minutes left, not many. I just want to say that when this whole matter started bubbling up before the 2014 election, the Liberals promised several hundred million dollars in loans and grants to expand the natural gas system. Over time, that sort of whittled down to about \$100 million in grants. That was the situation that we faced prior to this most recent election.

At the time of the last election, the Conservatives said that they had a plan for natural gas—it's embodied in this bill—and there would be a \$100 million in savings. What they didn't say was that there would be a \$100 million in savings, perhaps, to the provincial treasury, but a \$100-million increase in the cost of natural gas for the people of Ontario. I think that's an important distinction to make. In fact, almost immediately after the government was elected, the \$100 million to assist in the expansion of natural gas was cut from the budget, and the city of North Bay was informed that the Ford government had cancelled \$8.6 million in approved funding for natural gas expansion under the grant program.

Speaker, there are a lot of problems and issues that have to be resolved here. What's very clear is that this bill doesn't resolve those problems and issues; it only adds to them. With that, I happily turn the floor over to my colleague the member for Oshawa.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The member from Danforth did say at the beginning that he would be sharing his time with the member from Oshawa. I recognize the member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the member sharing the time with me today to speak again on Bill 32, on natural gas expansion.

Speaker, it's been quite a journey with this bill. This has been an issue that every member in this House has acknowledged and has recognized is of significant concern to folks across the province, and definitely to our remote, our rural, our agricultural, our northern and our on-reserve community members. They have been clamoring for access to affordable energy.

Certainly when we meet with the business community, we know without access to affordable energy, their potential is hampered. To create pathways to affordable energy—all of us seem to have been on the same page throughout this process and throughout the years, that we want to see that happen. How it happens is, I think, where we start to have some concerns.

I know that I had the opportunity to give an hour lead on behalf of the NDP on Bill 32. We raised a number of concerns—and they're not small concerns. We're not nit-picking here; we're talking about the fundamental structure that we're looking at in delivering this expansion and how this expansion of natural gas would indeed roll out across the province. I'll get into the specifics, but those concerns are real and we brought them up in this House.

Then I brought them up, I would say, in a very thoughtful and reasoned way in committee. I certainly heard that back from the government members that they agreed that these were conversations to be had. Yet, they did not support any of the 18 amendments. There were 18 amendments that we brought forward at committee, and all 18 were rejected.

I have to say, I have spent a fair bit of time on different committees. It's actually a part of this job and a part of this Legislature that I really respect and, I will say, that I enjoy, because it's the time we hear from folks across the province who come and get their voices on the record, whether they are challenging the government, whether they are supporting the government or whether they are fine-tuning. They are real Ontarians from outside of this bubble. I really value the input.

I'll tell you that one thing we heard at committee over and over and over—I am not arguing this—was the need for access to affordable energy, access to natural gas, in this case. This is what this bill purports to do. This is what this bill will, in part, accomplish. I think that the bill itself, as laid out, will indeed allow the incumbent distributors, like Enbridge and Union Gas, to expand natural gas. But it's "to whom" and "to which regions" where we have a real concern. It was reiterated at committee. We have heard, ad nauseam, that the need is there. The need is there for rural and remote and agricultural and northern communities. The minister and members of the government have used those words. We had asked the government to make it be a commitment, to put it in writing in the bill. The thing is, it didn't happen. We have a bill here that, again, just says we're expanding natural gas.

Speaker, I hope that I'm wrong, but I have a sneaking suspicion that, in a couple of years, when our northern and rural and remote and agricultural and on-reserve community members say, "Why do we still not have access to natural gas?" we will unfortunately have to point to the fact that—I don't know who is going to be making the decisions for where that expansion happens. We don't have any guarantees that it will be the OEB, and I'll get into that. But I worry. I worry that the folks that need it are not going to be first, second, third, fourth, fifth or in line at all to get this, despite the intent. That was something we heard a lot at committee, about the intent of this legislation, that it's in the design; it's inherent in the design. I heard a lot of really eloquent presentations at committee on the part of the government, talking about intent of the design, but I don't see it in writing, and that's discouraging.

I was saying I enjoy committee. I do. It's a chance, like I said, to hear from the broader community, but it's a chance during clause-by-clause—for the folks at home, clause-by-clause means you literally go through the bill line by line, clause by clause, and you add things, you change things and you make suggestions. Line by line, you try to improve the bill. That's what we did. We tried to go through this bill and make some important changes. None of them got made. It was the most polite committee I've been on in a while. It was very, "Respectfully, we're not

going to support this." It was, "We are here to listen. Thank you for this thoughtful feedback. We are going to take this back to the regulatory regime. We're going to consider this. We're going to have folks think this through." It was one of the most congenial and collegial committees I've been on—not productive, not by any stretch of the imagination, because there were not these changes.

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Anyway, let's go through them a little bit, shall we? Again, I'm going to give a brief overview of what the bill is set out to accomplish and what our concerns are with that. This is a bill that sets out a framework that allows the energy companies to, essentially, reach into the pockets of ratepayers to cover the profit, loss or whatever of the expansion. It's not a matter of the government paying for it. The last government, Speaker—you remember that the Liberals had a \$230-million original commitment. We never saw that. That didn't get distributed. Then they had a \$100-million fund that was going to go to certain projects to help get natural gas to these areas that need it. Otherwise, it wasn't feasible for Enbridge and folks to extend the lines there, so they were going to pay for that and help out with that expansion.

That \$100-million grant and fund—that is off the table now, and this bill is proposing a different direction. It is saying that these companies can lay the pipe and put natural gas wherever there are folks in need—I'm putting an asterisk when I say "in need" because I don't know who gets to determine that need. We'll come back to that. Historically, it has been the OEB, but who knows, with this one?

The cost—because it's still not economically viable to lay pipe everywhere; someone has to pay for that. So the money, instead of coming from the \$100-million grant, which was taxpayer money—the government says they are saving us \$100 million in taxpayer dollars because the costs will actually be paid by ratepayers. That's a new take on it.

The projects will move forward. We don't know how many a year. We don't know how many over 10 years. We don't know how fast. We have no idea what the ceiling is for cost. Who knows? Cross your fingers. That money will come from ratepayers. That money will go on the bills of existing ratepayers, I think. The new folks that will be transitioning will see savings because they will have access to natural gas. But as these projects happen across the province in different areas, that cost will be spread over top of the ratepayers. But Speaker, we don't know which ratepayers. We don't know if it's the whole province. We don't know if it is just—I don't know—Oshawa. Maybe it will just be the northern area around a project. We don't know. You can guess and I can guess and we can cross our fingers because, "It will all be part of regulations. Don't worry. Trust us. We're listening. Thanks for coming out and for your reasonable presentations."

That is the gist of it. Who will be funding the expansion will be up to cabinet. Cabinet can choose what a qualifying investment would be. So if a community has a project that

they want—north of Earlton, in the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane’s neck of the woods, they’ve been trying to get natural gas there for years. There’s a cluster of businesses there. I don’t know if their project will be approved, because it wasn’t before because it was too expensive. I have the letter from Enbridge—I read it into the record before—and it was too expensive.

Now that it would be funded by the broader ratepayer base, perhaps that would be one of the projects that gets picked, but I don’t know who makes that decision. Cabinet? Do they get to choose which areas, because I can already tell you which ones might get them. If it is up to the government to pick and choose, I’m going to argue that that’s not fair.

If it’s up to the OEB—like it always has been, as the regulatory body, our oversight body—to look at it and make sure that indeed it is to the benefit of the broader community, that it is a beneficial project and it gets to get forward, then I feel a bit better because that’s an independent body. That isn’t just cabinet deciding what a qualifying project would be, right? So compensation for natural gas distributors will be determined by regulation. Does the compensation equal the lost revenue? We don’t know. I do know that at committee, Enbridge asked for 100% of the cost. They said that what was on the table in this bill amounts to about 65%, and they said, “That’s not enough. For us to do this, it needs to be 100%.”

I will say, to the government’s credit, that they didn’t take that Enbridge amendment and submit it themselves, but that’s not to say that that won’t happen in regulation; that’s not to say that that change won’t be made. I hope the decisions will be made in the best interests of the ratepayer going forward.

Also, there was a section in here, as my colleague from Toronto–Danforth said, about what it looks like on the invoice. This cost that will be on maybe your invoice, maybe my invoice, or maybe just a particular group of ratepayers’ invoices—I’m not sure. What can go on that invoice? We said that partisan advertising can’t go on there, and that amendment was rejected. Sorry, Speaker; I’m trying to get over the shock of that. Again, I’ll talk more specifically about that.

Let’s go through some of the amendments. One of the amendments that we put forward was to actually use the words “rural, northern and on-reserve consumers.” We want to give a purpose to this bill, not just the spirit or the intent or the shared warm feelings. We wanted to actually put in this bill that indeed the folks who deserve this expansion, who have been asking for this expansion, would be rural, northern and on-reserve consumers. We said that if it’s a priority, then say it. Use the words; give purpose to this legislation. I don’t think the government should be able to misuse these subsidies, so we wanted to ensure that it went to certain areas. The answer was no. Actually, the answer was, “We’re listening, and we’ll take this back, and all of this will be decided under the regulatory regime.” Very lovely noes.

The second amendment we put forward was that we wanted the Ontario Energy Board, the OEB, to continue to

have oversight. We wanted to be clear on their role. We had a lot of, “Don’t worry. Their role will stay the same.” Over this new piece legislation, we wanted to ensure that indeed they not only have oversight but that they have a voice, that they get to determine what is a project that goes forward and that it is indeed for the benefit, directly or indirectly, of Ontarians.

Right now, the fear is that allowing the massive monopoly incumbents to decide which projects go forward or to allow that decision to be made by cabinet—we’re not okay with that. That is immensely problematic. Who gets to decide and who overrules those decisions? The amendment placed approval authority with the OEB, which is evidence-based and independent, and the decisions would be in the public and consumer interest—rejected.

The third amendment would ensure that rate protections go to the rural consumers that the government says it intends to help. This is rate protection because, frankly, Speaker, we don’t know what we’re in for. We’ve heard the government say, “No more than \$1.” We heard, in committee, Enbridge’s proposal for the number of projects—they do have an idea of the projects that are potentially on the horizon. We were wondering how quickly those projects would roll out. We want the folks at home who are paying these bills to have some heads-up, to have some understanding: How expensive is this going to be? Because if it’s a cost borne by all the ratepayers over 10 years, what will that look like? How many projects? Anyway, so many questions, none of them answered. But that one was also rejected. No rate protection for you, Speaker.

I’ve got way too many notes here. I will skip that one, because that’s wordy, if you can imagine. Yes, that was, again, another rate protection, also rejected.

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Our fifth amendment: the ratepayer-funded subsidies. This is about—actually, you know what? It’s too technical. The take-away is, we want decisions to be based on the best interests of consumers, and we think that if there’s a question—if the money runs out and there are only certain projects that can be prioritized, in the event of that, if we need to prioritize projects, we wanted the Ontario Energy Board to indeed be able to prioritize those projects based on benefits and best interests of consumers—also rejected.

Amendment 6: Again, it’s frustrating, because we heard a few different things at committee. We heard, “Don’t worry.” Well, maybe not those exact words, but the gist of it was, “Don’t worry. The OEB is still the OEB. The OEB still has a role to play.” Okay, but I still have the question: What is it? “Their mandate hasn’t changed.” Well, their mandate, broadly, is one thing. Specific to this legislation, which is a whole new framework, it needed to be outlined. It can’t be, “Why would you think that we would muck with that?” Well, I’ve got lots of reasons why I think they would muck with that.

It seems that the OEB is being relegated to observer status, which is problematic. They should still have that decision-making ability. They need to be able to continue to oversee these projects.

Like I said, Enbridge asked the committee for 100% of the costs of the project. One hundred per cent of the costs is what they said would enable them to go forward with the projects as they had proposed to the government. Someone does need to make sure that they don't run amok while the ratepayers are paying for it. People can tell me all day long, "Don't worry. That won't happen." Well, then, why on earth wouldn't we put the protections in place? Rejected.

Amendment 7: Oh, this one was fun. This was actually an interesting part of the conversation. I know there are folks in here who were at committee. This was the question that, 60 days before providing rate protection or making any subsequent changes to rate protection, the board shall publish on its website information about the impact. I argued that the public is on the hook for the costs of this expansion. The ratepayers are paying for this—this charge, this tax, whatever you want to call it. They don't want to call it a tax, but I can't figure out how we can justify it as a regulatory charge. The money that will be added to the invoice to cover the costs of this: The public is on the hook for that—in whole or in part, we don't know; you can guess. The public is on the hook for the costs of the expansion. They should be in the loop. I argued that this should be up on a website so folks could find out. And it was rejected.

I don't know how challenging it is to update a website 60 days before a project comes out. I have no idea why this was a problem. Maybe it was just a problem because, I don't know, maybe the government doesn't have broadband either. I don't really have this answer. But it didn't happen. I thought it was fair to be able to explain what will end up on their bill. Rejected.

Another amendment: The OEB is an oversight body. We said that, of course, the board should be able to review programs for compensation, service quality and reliability, and we wanted it clear. We wanted to outline their role clearly. Again, rejected—probably politely, but rejected. Oh, no; I was told, actually, in that case that it's a natural responsibility of the board. Well, a natural responsibility of the board still needs—with a new, fresh piece of legislation, their roles need to be outlined. Anyway, that was something.

Amendment number 9: No compensation is payable by consumers or classes of consumers if the consumers do not benefit, directly or indirectly. This is key. We were saying that, based on the core principles of the OEB, the fundamental principles of the OEB—one of them is that any project must benefit everyone. So this piece of legislation—it was a really interesting argument, because the government kept saying, "This is beneficial to everyone. Everyone will benefit." I said, "Prove it. Where is the measurable value of benefit?" For me in Oshawa to say, "I feel benefited because folks in another community have access to affordable energy"—well, maybe I do. Actually, I believe in growth across the province. But that isn't a measurable benefit. My warm fuzzies and feeling good as a human being is not a measurable benefit. It's not even a measurable indirect benefit. It's just nice to have.

We heard a couple of things: "Share the pain, share the gain. That's the Canadian way." Thank you. Maybe some of us would argue that; maybe some ratepayers will argue about it. But the point is, we wanted to make sure that everyone who was paying into this indeed benefitted. That was something that we kept hearing over and over, that this benefits everyone, that this is good for everyone. Well, they have to say that, Speaker. Do you know why they have to say that? Because we found out from the ministry when we asked about this extra charge on our invoices to come—and who knows for how long and what the charge will be, but it's access to ratepayers' pockets. We asked what that will be called, because it's a tax. They said, "No, it's not a tax. That's not a tax, it's a regulatory charge because of benefits. Everyone will benefit." Well, when we asked them to prove it—"No. That's not a thing." They couldn't.

Anyway, I said it should not be up to the bureaucrats, as lovely as I'm sure they are—and thank you for all of your hard work on all of the bills and all of the things. I don't think it should be up to anyone who works here to determine benefit, indirect or direct; it must be the OEB. Rejected.

Amendment 10: For something to be a regulatory charge, it must be of benefit, so what ratepayers will pay shouldn't exceed the value of the benefit. Again, we're talking about benefits, talking about expectations, talking about what ratepayers will inevitably have to pay. That amendment to address that was rejected.

Number 11: This is another one—I don't know what's so hard about updating websites. Anyway, this was that, at least 30 days before the approval of compensation with respect to costs, they need to publish a report on their website, including information about the total amount and a description demonstrating—wait for it—direct or indirect benefits.

Speaker, these are not crazy things to ask for on behalf of Ontarians. "Hey, if you're going to approve a project, what's it going to cost?" Make sure it's beneficial. Make sure that there's a measure of that benefit, directly or indirectly, and tell us about it. We have a right to know: How much is this going to cost Ontario? How do we decide what benefits the public? Rejected.

I mean, this is where we're getting to the crux of why we're not okay with this. Everyone will be paying for it, potentially. We don't know who will be paying because we couldn't get an answer and they, I think, are still figuring it out. But if it's the entire residential ratepayer base—oh, I'm sorry. I'm all over the map because there's so much to talk about. If the entire ratepayer base pays it, don't they have a right to know what the cost of a project is? "Over the next six months, this many projects will cost this amount. Spread across everyone, it's only 40 cents." "Okay, it should be nothing." Or, "We're not going to tell you because it's going to creep up over time." I don't think they know.

In the Enbridge proposal, the one that I think the government is most considering because their proposal matches the numbers we have been hearing from the

minister, they talked about—well, now I've just blanked. They talked about all sorts of things. Oh, I know what it was: It was about residential consumers being on the hook for this.

You know what? The Minister of Agriculture, when I snapped, I caught his eye. I'm glad to have it, I'll tell you. I asked the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, who presented at committee, if farmers were considered residential or if farmers were considered industry. What are they in terms of this? We know that farmers will benefit from having access to affordable energy. We know that, but when we were talking to them, I said, "Okay, but the costs are going to be borne by the ratepayer. It looks like residential; we don't know. Are farmers residential?" I think of my father. He doesn't quite qualify as a farmer. Don't tell him I said that because he's pretty proud of his hobby farm. But that's his home, right?

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Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: We're going to call him.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: And I won't tell you whose riding he's in either.

But my father's hobby farm, I would say, is not a farm; it's residential. He'll be paying for someone else's farm that is a farm if it's industry. But the answer from the OFA was, "A farmer is a farmer is a farmer." I liked that answer, but it doesn't tell me who is going to be part of paying for this and who will be left out. And in regulation, I don't know if that's going to be a permanent thing, if it's just the residential base, but then we find out the cost of this far exceeds what we anticipated because nothing is set out. It's just, "Who knows?" The private companies will decide. They're a monopoly, and the OMB just gets to have observer status.

Are we going to add in other consumer classes to cover this? I don't know. Are we going to be standing here in a couple of years saying, "Oh, my gosh, this is just like the last government in hydro, only now it's this government and natural gas bills. And how come our northern, rural, remote and on-reserve communities still don't have it?" Well, because Enbridge and friends get to decide who gets it, and they still don't want to pay for those lines up north because, as they said, they want 100% of the costs, not this paltry 65%. "Paltry" is my word, not theirs.

Back to that amendment—rejected.

Number 12 assures consumers that once a subsidy is approved, it won't later be increased if there's a cost overrun. This amendment would have protected consumers from costly project scope creep, that once a project has been approved—I wish it was by the OEB but anyway—and we've got our cost estimates, again, I wanted it to be put on a website so folks could see. They said no. We wanted to say that once it has been approved, it can't later be increased, that once that project has been estimated and is approved and going forward, you can't tack on costs afterwards, because people deserve to know what's going on. That was rejected.

Number 13 ensures that the upper limit or the maximum, the total cost of the program, needs to be known before compensation is approved so that everyone knows

what they're getting into. Nobody should argue against that—nobody. When we're talking about business cases—and I'm talking to a Conservative government that probably thinks they taught me the term "business case," but they didn't, as I'm looking at the member opposite nodding at me.

The point is, when you have a program, you should know what you're going to have to pay for it; the cost of the program is known before compensation is approved. You can't just write a blank cheque. You can't say, "Hey, tell us what the project's going to look like, then we'll just tell you we'll cover it, and then tell us what it will cost later." Everyone should know what they're getting into. But the government's not on the hook for this cost, Speaker. Remember, this is not the taxpayer. They will tell you that. We've been saying over and over this is not the taxpayer. No, it's the ratepayer. It's the same person. It's just a different pocket with a different label, right? It's a different bill. It's not their tax bill; it's their Enbridge, their natural gas bill. They've said it's not a tax. Somehow they benefit. Anyway, okay. Rejected.

That does not make any sense to me. There is no way that folks—I don't know. I don't know whether the government read the amendments ahead of time and—I can't imagine that conversation. It's like, "Hey, guys, you know what? Whatever it costs, it costs." Right? Shrug. There's no way that happened, and yet here we are.

Amendment 14—again with the websites. It would have let folks know how much the program will cost them ahead of time. It's interesting that this government is demanding this for carbon pricing. We thought they would have no problem with transparency: 60 days before rate protection is provided to put the total cost of the rate protection on a website. Maybe it's the website that's the problem. Maybe there should have been another way to put it; I don't know. Rejected.

Then there were a few that were housekeeping. If we'd used the words "rural," "remote," "northern," "agricultural" and "on-reserve"—if we were willing to put those words into this bill, then there were a couple of housekeeping amendments. I'm skipping those, Speaker, in case you're wondering what happened to them.

Number 17—oh, 17. Okay, I'm going to read it to you: "A regulation made under clause (6)(m) shall not provide for any partisan advertising on an invoice." It shall not provide for any partisan advertising on an invoice.

Speaker, I'm going to take you back in time, and it's not too long ago. The Liberals were notorious for using their hydro bills for government messaging and propaganda. The member from Toronto—Danforth reminded us. I've got members nodding in the room who remember.

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: He's also giving me a hard time, because apparently I'm using my teacher voice. It would be great if they would learn something. But anyway, I will not hold out hope.

Speaker, the last government—not this government, in fairness; the last government—used those bills as a vehicle to get their partisan messaging into homes. Well, guess

what? We said, for sure, that this government, who sat on the same opposition benches with us last session and agreed with us—“Oh, my goodness. That is a problem. How dare they?” I don’t have the Hansard, but I’m sure that it was really passionate language, because they didn’t agree with it either. This amendment would have prevented the same thing from happening with natural gas bills.

Do you know what, Speaker? It was rejected. But it wasn’t just rejected. A couple of them, they just quietly voted against, and there wasn’t discussion. This was not one of those. In fact, there was some conversation. Folks agreed that Ontarians need to trust their government and that we shouldn’t be abusing that trust, and all of that sort of stuff, or that they share concerns about what the Liberals had done. But then I was told: “‘Partisan’ is way too broad. Where do we begin?” The word “partisan” was just way too broad, and “where do we begin?”

If you asked the Integrity Commissioner to tell you about “partisan,” which I would encourage all of us to do—it’s not way too broad; it’s pretty darned clear. So to reject it and to say, “If you find something abusive in the bills, we can connect with the Integrity Commissioner and bring it up there”—this is the government. I guarantee that they’re not going to call the Integrity Commissioner on themselves if there’s something problematic in the invoices.

In fact, voting against that sends a really clear message, probably as clear as what we’re going to see on these bills. Anyway, it’s really disappointing. I will say that I actually was surprised at that. Not providing any partisan advertising on an invoice: rejected.

Ahem. Ahem. I can’t sit down, because I still have more to do.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Drink some water.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I’ve had some water. I don’t want to drown—which might be why the member is suggesting that I drink.

Number 18 was to remove the “general or particular” clause. Basically, one of the pieces of the bill kind of gave carte blanche to the government. They could enact different rules that apply to different people under different circumstances, and it didn’t really make any sense that it was there. The only reason it might be there is because they don’t yet know what they’re trying to accomplish, and they want to leave that there so that they can figure it out as they go. The “figure it out later” thing is very concerning.

1740

Speaker, those are the 18 amendments that were all flatly, soundly rejected.

So—ahem. I think I’m going to survive, to some folks’ chagrin. So again, Speaker, we have a bill that is about to become the law of the land, that reaches into ratepayers’ pockets, that gives private companies and private monopolies the opportunity to lay pipe wherever they want, to whomever they decide, without those decisions being overseen and overruled, potentially, by the OEB.

The government has said, “It’s in the design. It will all happen in regulation. We have listened to you in committee. We’re taking it back to the people and we’re going to really think about this while we make regulations.” Speaker, regulations are a closed process. On committee, I was told by one of the government members that it’s not a closed process, that this is a government that is accessible to the people. I’ve heard that a lot, versions of that. The thing about regulations, though, is that they’re not up to the public. What is in the statute, what is in the actual legislation—this is when we get to make these big changes. The fine-tuning is what is supposed to happen in regulation. What we see here is not fine-tuning; it’s meat and potatoes.

Our concern is that this is quite a lever. The government is allowing private industry to reach into ratepayers’ pockets. We don’t know whose pockets—all of Ontarians’, potentially. We don’t actually have faith that this government will indeed ensure that natural gas is indeed delivered to the people who need it. They’ve said that it will get to those in need, but it’s up to the private companies to decide who needs it or up to the government to decide who needs it. That is wrong. It should be up to an independent body, to the OEB. The OEB needs to scrutinize these benefits and have that independent oversight.

I’m getting choked up. What I will do is sit down and I will wait for my two-minute wrap-up, and hopefully by then I can finish these thoughts. But we cannot support something that gives this kind of unfettered access to Ontarians without provisions of protection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions and comments?

Ms. Donna Skelly: I represent an area of the province that is diverse, not only in the makeup of its people but also its geography. In fact—I was just talking to the member beside me—Flamborough–Glanbrook is a blend of urban and rural. It spans from the borders of Burlington to Grimsby, Cambridge to Hamilton Mountain. It is because of this unique composition that a disadvantage has actually been created for a number of my constituents.

In much of the rural area of Flamborough–Glanbrook, like many parts of rural Ontario and northern Ontario, residents are struggling to pay their heating bills, and that’s because of the soaring hydro rates that the previous government created—a direct result of the previous Liberal government’s expensive Green Energy Act that forced many families to choose between heating and eating. We’ve heard that many times.

Bill 32 will change that. I am very proud to stand here today to be part of a government that truly understands the challenges facing average Ontarians, hard-working men and women who are struggling to get ahead. Bill 32 will change that. It will bring natural gas to communities that currently simply don’t have access to it. Mr. Speaker, Ontario families want a cheaper alternative to heat their homes. If Bill 32, the Access to Natural Gas Act, is passed, it will give them an alternative that is cheaper than electric heat, that is cheaper than propane or oil. Families will

realize savings in the thousands of dollars. This is just one initiative that this government has committed to. It's why we have listened to the people, and it's why we are doing the right thing by introducing Bill 32.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions and comments?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Listening to this debate has an air of the unreal about it. My dad is an architect, and he would be appalled if somebody said, "Here's the design for a house that has no staircase. It's a two-storey house and has no staircase." An engineer would come and say, "There's a problem, because you don't have a plan with a staircase in it," and somebody would say, "But don't worry. It's in the design." That's what we've been listening to in the comments this afternoon, and it makes no sense.

I was here at the beginning of the debate of this bill, and we were pointing out specifically what is for me a really critical piece, which is that if you're going to create a bill for people who need gas the most, you need to make sure that the bill spells out specifically that it's going to go to northern communities and that it's going to go to on-reserve communities, the ones that need it desperately.

I was here listening to my colleague talk about the death by suicide of a young girl in his community because she lived in a house that had no heating, among other causes, because there was that kind of desperate poverty, and everybody was silent. Everybody was silent; you could hear that pin drop. And yet, when there was an opportunity to take a bill in committee, and folks were saying the kinds of things we had been saying here in the House—"Here's how you make it better. Here's how you ensure that this gas is going to go to the people who need it most"—those suggestions were rejected.

That's one reason that I'm really troubled. The other reason is that I've sat here over and over again as the members have said, "Work with us." Well, here you were being worked with, and the answer was rejected. That's not good enough.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions and comments?

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: It gives me great pleasure to stand up today to speak on Bill 32, the proposed Access to Natural Gas Act. If this legislation is passed, it would allow the government to develop a program to bring natural gas to more families and businesses throughout rural and northern Ontario. Our government ran on a mandate to provide the people of Ontario with much-needed energy relief, to put money back in their pockets and to open Ontario for business. As we have mentioned, in too many parts of rural, remote and northern Ontario, families and businesses still do not have access to natural gas. Our government is here to make life easier and more affordable for the people in Ontario. Bill 32 would help achieve this goal.

For the average residential consumer in Ontario, the switch from electric heat, propane or oil to natural gas would result in savings of between \$800 and \$2,500 a

year. Expanding natural gas would make Ontario communities more attractive for job creation and new businesses. This will send a clear message that Ontario is open for business.

I am delighted to be here today to help move this proposed legislation forward. We need, as a government, to put more money back into the pockets of working people in this province. I can confirm to you today that, if this bill passes, we will do just that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions and comments?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Listening and being part of this debate, I do feel a little bit of kinship with backbench PC members, because here I am, being asked to vote on something, with few details and with no respect for my opinion. We suggested amendments, many of them, and these were ignored—simple ones even.

1750

From the lens of Humber River–Black Creek, I fear that people in my community—seniors, people struggling to make ends meet—will be footing the bill for what? Possibly speculative work by an industry that will, under this bill, be allowed to recover all of their work, all of their infrastructure through billing, and I fear that I'm part of what it must have felt like in the late 1990s when the PCs had their hands in Hydro. They like to blame the Liberal government for the ruination of Hydro. They began it. Are we seeing, possibly, this happening here, where everyone around the province will be footing the bill for private industry?

Interestingly enough, they use this under the guise of giving gas options to rural communities. Well, perhaps they might say that. But when you look at when this was announced, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture was not present; it was the Ontario Home Builders' Association. So does that mean—what's really at stake here—we're going to see a bill that seeks to just tear up rural land, replacing it with residential communities? And make no mistake: I have no trust in a government that, before this election, was talking about ripping up the moraine, so excuse me if I don't have a lot of trust—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. I return to the member from Oshawa for a two-minute summation.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have been glad to present again our case for Bill 32 and why, unfortunately, it isn't what it should be. It should be a commitment to rural, northern and on-reserve communities that they would have access to natural gas, that they would have access to affordable energy because they deserve it, because they need it. We have always said that we support that, and here we have a bill that instead of still giving the OEB its opportunity to make sure that projects are in the best interests of Ontarians, that people benefit, that there's a measurable benefit, directly or indirectly—instead, that is not happening. Instead, what we have here is a lick and a promise from the government, saying, "Don't worry. It will all be fine." But we will be standing here, probably in a couple of years, saying, "How come none of our northern

community members and our agricultural community members still don't have this expansion? Because I thought they were going to get it. I thought that's what Bill 32 was supposed to accomplish"—even though it doesn't lay that out. Even though they wouldn't say the words "rural, northern or on-reserve communities." They still won't see it.

The costs: We have no idea what they are. We've asked to know what they are. We've asked for that to be communicated to Ontarians, and we were told "No." We asked that the invoices not be used for partisan purposes, and we were actually told "No." Not only did they vote against it, the government member at committee said, "What's partisan? That's a broad term."

Come on. If this were really about offering affordable natural gas to more people across Ontario, then it would spell it out. It would say it there, and there would be guarantees and protections in place so that this would be a success story. I don't believe it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Further debate?

Mr. Parm Gill: I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak on this important bill for the next few minutes. As always, it's an honour and a privilege to rise in this House to speak on behalf of my constituents in the great riding of Milton. We're obviously talking about Bill 32 today, Access to Natural Gas Act, 2018, brought forward by my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is one that will affect many people in Ontario in a big way. If passed, it will not only help families but also help farmers, small businesses, and it will save costs and as a result add to the economy of our great province of Ontario. If passed, this legislation will encourage private sector partnerships with communities to expand natural gas to remote, rural and northern areas of our great province.

Many in my riding of Milton have been asking for this for years. Their cries have gone unanswered for 15 long years. I am proud to support this important bill that will help the rural area of my riding of Milton as well as many other parts of Ontario.

The Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, is amended to provide rate protection for consumers with respect to costs incurred by a gas distributor in making a qualifying investment for the purposes of providing access to a natural gas distribution system to those consumers.

Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of having our Premier and the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines in my riding of Milton to make this important announcement just a few short months ago. In that announcement, the Premier and the minister laid out that as of October 1, our PC government has taken the carbon tax off of natural gas bills for all Ontarians. This will save consumers, the average family, approximately \$80 per year, and small businesses, approximately \$285 per year.

There are no small savings, as is often said. Money saved is money earned. This announcement in my riding of Milton a few months ago took place at a small business in my riding called Troy's Diner. Troy is a huge part of

our community and loves giving back, and has always given back to local organizations, local groups—anyone who reaches out to Troy. He has sponsored multiple sports teams and local clubs over the years. He is a landmark in our community of Milton, on Main Street.

During the election, I had the opportunity to speak to Troy, and he shared a story with me. The story was basically about some of the struggles over the years that he had been facing with the previous Liberal government's failed policies, especially when it came to hurting small businesses, which are really the backbone of our economy. Troy shared the challenges that his business was facing, especially to do with high energy costs, and the previous piece of legislation, brought forward by the Liberals, Bill 148, and the kinds of challenges that his business was facing with Bill 148, and why he was no longer able to support these local organizations, groups and sports clubs. Over the years, he had enjoyed and loved donating to and supporting all sorts of wonderful causes in and around Milton.

It got to a point where, he said, he literally drafted a letter explaining all of the challenges his business and he were facing, to do with the Liberal government's policies. When somebody would come in asking for funds, asking for financial support for their cause, for their organizations, he would explain to them, and at the same time he would hand them this letter that outlined, as I mentioned, all of the challenges. Then he would encourage them, or ask individuals or organizations, to literally go to the former MPP's office and have a conversation and explain to them how it was not only hurting the local business, Troy's Diner, but also, now it was hurting local groups and organizations because they were no longer able to get the support that they used to be able to get over the years.

That's just one example amongst many, many others.

When I talk to farmers in my riding who don't have access to natural gas, it's obviously a huge challenge for them.

I understand that I'm running out of time. I appreciate the opportunity and hope to continue—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. You will have an opportunity at a future date, when the debate continues.

Third reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

1800

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We do have two late shows this evening. The member for Hamilton Centre has given notice of dissatisfaction with an answer to a question given by the Acting Premier. The member has five minutes to debate the matter, and the

Premier's parliamentary assistant, the PA from King–Vaughan, may reply for up to five minutes.

I turn now to the leader of the official opposition, the member from Hamilton Centre.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to start by outlining for folks the fact that I've called us back here this evening purposely, because the people of Ontario deserve answers. That's the bottom line. The official opposition, Her Majesty's loyal official opposition, has a role to play here, and that is to get answers from the government.

We are here because we are dissatisfied—I'm here because I am dissatisfied—on behalf of the people of Ontario, with the answers that I received to questions that I put to the government last week; because the government of the day in this province has a responsibility to provide answers when they're asked basic and important questions; because the Minister of Finance last week refused to do that during question period on Thursday; and because something stinks in the Premier's office.

Mr. Speaker, according to media reports and according to the government's own staff, there are deeply troubling abuses of power that may be going on right in the Premier's office. In fact, according to the *Globe and Mail*, Conservative insiders say that the Premier's chief of staff, Dean French, personally reached out to the head of the board of the OPG, Ontario Power Generation, and directed the OPG to remove a political enemy of the Premier, Alykhan Velshi, after just one day on the job. A single day on the job, and the Premier's hand-picked chief of staff reached into the OPG—something that is verboten, something that should not happen—reached over there and got that guy fired. The severance of Alykhan Velshi is as much as half a million dollars, more money than most Ontarians make in over a decade. That's half a million dollars that comes right out of the pockets of Ontario families, of the people of Ontario.

Then another bombshell drops, this time from the *Toronto Star*. The Premier's chief of staff, Dean French, “ordered senior political aides to direct police to raid outlaw cannabis stores the day marijuana became legal and to show ‘people in handcuffs’”—to actually show people in handcuffs. In other words, it was the Premier's chief of staff who said to the police, “We want you to have people in handcuffs that we can show off to the media at the noon news.”

I should hope that the members of this Legislature—all members, on all sides—understand the gravity, the absolute chilling nature, of the Premier's office directing police activities and ordering arrests. It is not just inappropriate; it is absolutely dangerous and an antithesis to our democracy when that kind of thing happens.

According to reports, the staff who received that order didn't want to do it, because they knew better; they knew it was wrong. In fact, the *Star* reported that the chief of staff to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, Ken Bednarek, who is a lawyer, spoke up and actually questioned the decision to make that interference occur. Mr. Bednarek no longer works for this government, so we wonder why that happened.

The question that the people of Ontario have is whether the Premier ordered Mr. French to do any of these things, or whether Mr. French has gone rogue and the Premier is allowing it to happen.

So on Thursday, I asked these questions here in the Legislature. I asked the Minister of Finance, the Acting Premier, if the Premier had spoken to Mr. French on these matters. I asked if an investigation into these matters by the Integrity Commissioner will be released publicly. I asked about Ken Bednarek. I asked about staff losing their jobs for refusing to get in line and follow orders.

What I got in return was weak tales about taxes, a statement about cannabis and a ratcheted-up personal and political attack on myself and my party. What I didn't get, what the people of Ontario did not get, is an answer. This is not a game here, Speaker, so I'm asking the questions again and I expect an answer.

Can the government tell us if the Premier has spoken with Dean French, his chief of staff, concerning the *Toronto Star* report that he attempted to order police arrests, and the *Globe and Mail* report that he personally intervened to have Alykhan Velshi fired from OPG? Why are the government's own staff saying that they fear losing their jobs if they speak truth to power in this government? Is that why Ken Bednarek no longer has a job?

Finally, will the government commit to publicly releasing the Integrity Commissioner's report on this whole sordid affair if indeed an investigation is under way?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The parliamentary assistant, the member from King–Vaughan, has five minutes to reply.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Thank you for the opportunity to rise in this Legislature today to reiterate our government's commitment to restoring accountability and trust.

Let me be clear to the member opposite: Our Progressive Conservative government holds the highest ethical standards, not only for our staff, but also for our members. The facts hold true for every individual working for this government, be it in constituency offices or here at Queen's Park. Furthermore, staff are devoted to working towards delivering on our mandate as a government, the mandate that the overwhelming majority of Ontarians voted for—and may I remind the Leader of the Opposition that they rejected the socialist agenda of your party in the last election.

Our mission, Mr. Speaker, contrary to the revisionism of the member opposite—we know that reality must set in, but the people in their solemn decision chose to say no to the NDP and yes to the Progressive Conservative Party led by the Premier, Doug Ford. Our mission is undeterred. It is to deliver on the priorities of people.

Mr. Speaker, I heard a quote by the member opposite. She said “weak tales” on taxes. I appreciate that the member opposite does not want to talk about her agenda on taxation, because every single person in this province—every senior, every family, every consumer, every small business—will pay more under her plan. I know why she doesn't want to talk about that.

But the fact of the matter is that we will continue to focus on restoring trust after 15 years of Liberal

mismanagement and scandal, a government supported by Ontario's New Democratic Party. We have taken action to reform the energy sector, to make life affordable for families, for small business.

With respect to the OPG, an issue mentioned by the member opposite, I want to reiterate what the Minister of Energy and what the Premier of this province have said in this Legislature: that OPG is responsible for their own staffing decisions.

On the broader energy file, I am proud to report that Ontario's carbon tax era is over in this province. We campaigned on a clear commitment. We campaigned on a clear commitment to eliminate the cap-and-trade carbon tax. We are cutting gasoline taxes by 10 cents per litre. You may have noticed, in Windsor, Mr. Speaker; in Hamilton, to the member opposite; and in communities across this province, that gasoline prices have dipped below \$1. Mr. Speaker, we're making a commitment and we're following through. We have eliminated the cap-and-trade carbon tax, which has saved over \$260 per family.

Mr. Speaker, we have renewed the board and the CEO of Hydro One without \$1 of severance paid. We saved over \$700 million by cancelling bad energy contracts. This is decisive leadership that's putting the interests of the taxpayer first.

The government is removing the burden from Ontario business and families, and helping to grow this economy and helping to create better jobs. While our aim is to protect and create jobs, the federal government—which seems to be supported by the NDP and the Leader of the Opposition—seems to be focused on an oppressive carbon tax that will actually hurt the most vulnerable.

The member opposite said we refused to answer their questions. Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Leader of the Opposition: What is the level of the carbon tax you support? Is it \$50 per tonne? Is it \$100? Is it \$150? The member from Ottawa Centre wants \$150—the most expensive carbon tax in the world.

Mr. Speaker, it sounds like there's no answer from the members opposite, because they choose silence over action. They would rather support the Prime Minister, who is raising the price on the most vulnerable industries—including our automotive sector. We're focused on the priorities of keeping people safe. We're focused on putting money in the pockets of workers. We're focused on creating jobs for the next generation. This is our priority.

I mentioned safety because we're focused on keeping people safe. It is perhaps the most solemn duty of any government. We put \$25 million—invested additional money—to help combat guns and gangs in the city of Toronto. We have worked to ensure that our police have stopped 91% of illegal dispensaries in the four largest municipalities in the province of Ontario. They have been shut down, thanks to the amazing work of our men and women in uniform.

Ontarians elected us to clean up the mess made by the previous government, and we will be undeterred from our mission: jobs for our workers, opportunity for our young people and prosperity for small business in this province.

1810

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

RESPONSABILITÉ GOUVERNEMENTALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Premier. The member from Ottawa South will have five minutes to make his address, and the parliamentary assistant will have five minutes to respond.

I turn to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for giving me a preview as to the member's answer. I respect all the things that the Leader of the Opposition said, and I want to say this about accountability. There's a story that Dean French directed police and that he got Alykhan Velshi fired, costing taxpayers a half-million dollars. The Premier was asked, "Have you spoken to him? The Premier said, "Well, I don't think he did it. I didn't speak to him." I'm not sure—I mean, that's accountability at its basest level: Ask somebody if they've done something. The Premier's not interested in that. So I think if we take a look—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for York Centre, come to order and return to your seat, please.

Mr. John Fraser: —question to the Minister of Finance, Acting Premier that day, I was talking about the fall economic statement and about how accountability is being attacked in the fall economic statement. The elimination of the francophone services commissioner is wrong. There are voices inside their own government and caucus that are telling them that.

Le gouvernement ne comprend pas la communauté franco-ontarienne, leur lutte et leur travail pour avoir des services en français dans les soins de santé, dans l'éducation et l'éducation postsecondaire, et pour tous les services.

This symbol is an important thing in a community of minority languages. The struggles of the francophone community are represented in places like the Montfort, like the French university, like the independent commissioner for French-language services. There's a fundamental understanding about how this country and this province were built, and the elimination of that post—all the stuff they did last Friday is not worth a hill of beans because it doesn't address the core question.

The same thing goes for the child advocate. Children in this province, children in care, the most vulnerable children, children whose voices are the hardest to hear, need an advocate. They don't need an ombudsman. They don't need an arbitrator. They need an advocate, and that advocate is there not just to fight for their rights but to protect them. Right now, there are 27 cases in front of the child advocate—27 cases. The child advocate is looking at vulnerable populations like First Nations youth and Black youth in this province. It's wrong that they are moving that independent commissioner.

It's the same with the Environmental Commissioner. Without a plan for climate change, which is coming Friday—a plan which I understand, if the news reports are true, actually isn't based on market values—cost of treasury money and emissions go up. But we'll see. I look forward to the minister's announcement.

Also, the government is opening the backroom door to corporate union donations. Now, I know the Minister of Finance said, "You're wrong. You're wrong." But he didn't say to me, and I hope the member opposite will say, "We're leaving the attestation for 'own funds' in." They didn't say that. That needs to be there. It protects people who are giving money. If you're an employer and you say to your employee, "Here's 100 bucks. Go and buy a ticket for their dinner," do you know the rules? No, you don't know the rules. You know the rules if they are there in front of you and you have to sign an attestation. I hear the barking on the other side. All they have to do is bark back and say the attestation will be there. That's all we need to hear, and that backroom door won't be open.

I know you're changing the standing orders. Actually, I'm not worried about that. You can move the goalposts. You can do whatever you want. We're going to use whatever we have here to hold you accountable. And it may not be a lot.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): The member for Niagara West will return to your assigned seat. Thank you.

Mr. John Fraser: It may not be a lot, but we're going to use it. I want to remind you of that.

The last thing is the select committee—the third act in what I call the Fedeli trilogy—failed to call Ontario's controller, whose signature is not on the public accounts this year. It has always been on the public accounts. The Conservatives voted down the NDP because they didn't want her to appear. Why? What's wrong with her appearing?

I heard the member from Sault Ste. Marie say, "Well, she's there for herself." I'd find that easier to take if it didn't come from a member who compared take-home cancer drugs to ice cream.

There's some accountability on your side. Call the controller—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you.

Unfortunately, the time for further debate—oh, you still have time. See, I've been so distracted by your own members barking back and forth here that I've lost track. I shall return to the parliamentary assistant, the member from King–Vaughan, for a five-minute response to the member from Ottawa South.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: Mr. Speaker, I'm often inspired, not distracted, by the energy and competence of my colleagues on the Conservative side, but thank you for noting that.

I want to thank the honourable member, who I have tremendous respect for, for bringing us back here at 6 o'clock. We're all pleased to be here.

I just want to note to him that this government believes that the bedrock of our democracy is accountable government. As a member of this caucus, I commend our cabinet, our Premier and every single one of our members for having the integrity, which is upheld in this place, to serve the people of this province. This integrity extends from our elected officials to our hard-working staff. Ontarians place their trust in our elected officials, and this government understands the tremendous responsibility that accompanies this. A responsible democratic government is one that listens and responds to its constituents by making well-informed, balanced decisions. We get this.

The government welcomes accountability. I stand behind and am proud of the decisions of this government. We're working for the people of this province to reverse the damage inflicted after 15 years of Kathleen Wynne's Liberals' waste and mismanagement.

It is quite ironic to hear this member speak about the importance of accountability. Where the heck was he during the gas plants scandal, during the Ornge fiasco, during the destruction of government emails? You talk about accountability. Where were you when the Auditor General didn't sign off on your books for three years? Where were you when 325,000 jobs were lost by this province—high-paying union jobs, I would add? Where was the member when the government doubled the debt? The last time we doubled the debt was under the former New Democratic government.

Mr. Speaker, we want to walk the walk when it comes to accountability. We want to ensure value for money, that tax dollars are protected, and we're doing that. We are doing that every single day. We are rebuilding the trust of this province after no accountability by the former government.

Look, the people of this province made a determination to hold accountable a government that wasn't listening, that was out of touch, and that was not responsive to the needs of working people. We are attacking the province's devastating debt. We are lowering hydro rates. We're creating better jobs in this province. The government is demonstrating a strong commitment to delivering on our mandate.

We are restoring government accountability. This was a key commitment that we promised and that resonated with the people of this province after 15 years of Liberal reign that brought a lack of transparency that raised concerns from every single person in this province.

I'm proud to be part of a caucus and a Progressive Conservative government that is actively taking steps to restore trust in government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.

This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1819.

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Hogarth, Christine (PC)	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Hunter, Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough—Guildwood	
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Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma—Manitoulin	
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
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Mulroney, Hon. / L'hon. Caroline (PC)	York—Simcoe	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister of Francophone Affairs / Ministre des Affaires francophones
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent—Leamington	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West / Niagara-Ouest	
Pang, Billy (PC)	Markham—Unionville	
Park, Lindsey (PC)	Durham	
Parsa, Michael (PC)	Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill	
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth—Wellington	
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Rod (PC)	Ajax	Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks / Ministre de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs
Piccini, David (PC)	Northumberland—Peterborough South / Northumberland—Peterborough-Sud	
Rakocevic, Tom (NDP)	Humber River—Black Creek	
Rasheed, Kaleed (PC)	Mississauga East—Cooksville / Mississauga-Est—Cooksville	
Rickford, Hon. / L'hon. Greg (PC)	Kenora—Rainy River	Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines / Ministre de l'Énergie, du Développement du Nord et des Mines Minister of Indigenous Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones
Roberts, Jeremy (PC)	Ottawa West—Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest—Nepean	
Romano, Ross (PC)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Sabawy, Sheref (PC)	Mississauga—Erin Mills	
Sandhu, Amarjot (PC)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh (PC)	Brampton South / Brampton-Sud	
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Schreiner, Mike (GRN)	Guelph	
Scott, Hon. / L'hon. Laurie (PC)	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Shaw, Sandy (NDP)	Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas / Hamilton-Ouest—Ancaster—Dundas	
Simard, Amanda (PC)	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	
Singh, Gurrajan (NDP)	Brampton East / Brampton-Est	
Singh, Sara (NDP)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Skelly, Donna (PC)	Flamborough—Glanbrook	
Smith, Dave (PC)	Peterborough—Kawartha	
Smith, Hon. / L'hon. Todd (PC)	Bay of Quinte / Baie de Quinte	Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade / Ministre du Développement économique, de la Création d'emplois et du Commerce Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Stevens, Jennifer (Jennie) (NDP)	St. Catharines	
Stiles, Marit (NDP)	Davenport	
Surma, Kinga (PC)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto—Danforth	
Tangri, Nina (PC)	Mississauga—Streetsville	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thanigasalam, Vijay (PC)	Scarborough—Rouge Park	
Thompson, Hon. / L'hon. Lisa M. (PC)	Huron—Bruce	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Tibollo, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (PC)	Vaughan—Woodbridge	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
Triantafilopoulos, Effie J. (PC)	Oakville North—Burlington / Oakville-Nord—Burlington	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming—Cochrane	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Wai, Daisy (PC)	Richmond Hill	
Walker, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (PC)	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
West, Jamie (NDP)	Sudbury	
Wilson, Jim (IND)	Simcoe—Grey	
Wynne, Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	
Yakubski, Hon. / L'hon. John (PC)	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Yarde, Kevin (NDP)	Brampton North / Brampton-Nord	
Yurek, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (PC)	Elgin—Middlesex—London	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports

**STANDING AND SELECT COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS ET SPÉCIAUX DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Wayne Gates
Stan Cho, Jill Dunlop
John Fraser, Wayne Gates
Stephen Lecce, Gila Martow
Jane McKenna, Judith Monteith-Farrell
Lindsey Park, Randy Pettapiece
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Timothy Bryan

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Stephen Crawford
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stan Cho
Stephen Crawford, Doug Downey
Sol Mamakwa, David Piccini
Jeremy Roberts, Sandy Shaw
Donna Skelly
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Timothy Bryan

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Dave Smith
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Jessica Bell, Lorne Coe
Chris Glover, Christine Hogarth
Logan Kanapathi, Daryl Kramp
Natalia Kusendova, Amarjot Sandhu
Mike Schreiner, Dave Smith
Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przewdziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Président: John Vanthof
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Roman Baber, Rudy Cuzzetto
Amy Fee, Vincent Ke
Andrea Khanjin, Marie-France Lalonde
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls
Jeremy Roberts, Marit Stiles
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Parm Gill
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Roman Baber, Aris Babikian
Nathalie Des Rosiers, Jill Dunlop
Parm Gill, Lindsey Park
Ross Romano, Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria
Sara Singh, Monique Taylor
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Jocelyn McCauley

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Présidente: Jane McKenna
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Robert Bailey, Rima Berns-McGown
Michael Coteau, Mike Harris
Faisal Hassan, Jane McKenna
Christina Maria Mitas, Sam Oosterhoff
Amanda Simard, Gurratan Singh
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Peggy Sattler
Catherine Fife, Goldie Ghamari
Jim McDonnell, Norman Miller
Suze Morrison, Michael Parsa
Peggy Sattler, Kinga Surma
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Randy Hillier
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Kaleed Rasheed
Toby Barrett, Will Bouma
Mike Harris, Randy Hillier
Mitzie Hunter, Laura Mae Lindo
Paul Miller, Billy Pang
Kaleed Rasheed, Amarjot Sandhu
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Présidente: Nina Tangri
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Deepak Anand, Doly Begum
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Belinda Karahalios, Robin Martin
Sheref Sabawy, Nina Tangri
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
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Select Committee on Financial Transparency / Comité spécial de la transparence financière

Chair / Président: Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Doug Downey
Roman Baber, Doug Downey
Catherine Fife, Robin Martin
Lindsey Park, Ross Romano
Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria, Sandy Shaw
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim