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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 4 December 2018

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 4 décembre 2018

The House met at 0900.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GREEN ENERGY REPEAL ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 ABROGEANT
LA LOI SUR L'ÉNERGIE VERTE

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 20, 2018, on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 34, An Act to repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to amend the Electricity Act, 1998, the Environmental Protection Act, the Planning Act and various other statutes / *Projet de loi 34, Loi abrogeant la Loi de 2009 sur l'énergie verte et modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité, la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement, la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire et diverses autres lois.*

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): When the House last debated this bill, the member for Sarnia–Lambton had the floor. He continues to have time. I recognize the member for Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had a great morning this morning with the Egg Farmers of Ontario. I'll give them a shout-out. They were cooking omelettes for all of us down there, so it was a great morning.

Where we left off with the Green Energy Act: Ontario's government for the people is delivering on that promise to repeal the 2009 Green Energy Act and reduce Ontario's skyrocketing hydro rates. Under the former government, energy rates had tripled, hurting families and driving manufacturing jobs out of Ontario. Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker: The Green Energy Act helped Liberal insiders get rich while families across Ontario were forced to choose between heating and eating and putting food on their plates. The Green Energy Act made it so much harder for businesses in Ontario to stay in business. Thousands of jobs were lost across Ontario because manufacturing plants were too expensive to operate.

One of the first actions we took as a government was to cancel over 758 expensive and wasteful wind energy projects as part of our plan to cut hydro rates by 12%. Many of those future energy wind turbine projects, Mr. Speaker, would have been in my riding of Sarnia–Lambton and the adjacent riding of Lambton–Kent–Middlesex. I'm glad to say that those projects were cancelled, stopped and put an end to.

There was too much division, Mr. Speaker, in parts of Ontario. We all heard it. I heard it numerous times. Families

were split; churches divided; communities divided; parents not speaking to loved ones. Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners were awkward because people came to find out that one part of the family had signed a lease and signed an agreement; other parts of the family disagreed with that.

I talked to one farmer, and he said, "Mother told us never to talk about green energy or anything at dinner because it was too disruptive." So, Mr. Speaker, we've put an end to that. I'm glad to say that we were able to have some small part.

In my role as an opposition member, when I had the privilege to serve in Her Majesty's loyal opposition, I had the opportunity to speak many times, to rise on that issue and have the privilege to speak about it. Then when we were given the honour and privilege of forming the government, I was given the opportunity to see that through and carry through with that and actually bring those actions and those thoughts to fruition. That was a promise made and a promise kept.

The previous government, as it's well known, forced and shoved these wind and solar projects into the backyards of many communities that didn't want them, and that was wrong. We're restoring the ability of local communities, through their municipalities, to control where major facilities can be built.

As a number of people pointed out, if you can say where a Tim Hortons or any other fast-food restaurant can be located, and/or if they can have access to major roads, yet you can't have any influence on where major industrial wind turbine projects—or solar, which weren't nearly as intrusive—could be located, there seemed to be something wrong with that. I'm proud to say that we, as a government, were able to change that, put an end to that, and we were able to move forward.

This proposed legislation would give government the authority to stop approval of wasteful energy projects, projects where the need for electricity has not been demonstrated. This would put the brakes on additional projects that would only add costs to electricity bills that the people of Ontario simply can't afford.

There's the old adage that when you're in a hole, if you want to get out, you quit digging. I don't know why the government of the day—someday I'm going to sit down and have a conversation; I'd love to find out. Once they realized they had met their goals, and they had more energy than they could use and were actually giving it away at a sale price to neighbouring jurisdictions, why did they continue to try and approve these projects and continue building these projects? No one has ever given me an answer. Maybe I should have sat in on one of those

committees where they were questioning the energy minister and the former Premier and public servants who were in government at the time. Maybe I'll have to look through the notes and see if that ever came up. I think that's an answer we all should have in this Legislature.

We believe that the people of Ontario should have the final say about what gets built in their communities, and that municipalities should also have the power to stop expensive and unneeded energy projects in their community.

We're also keeping the parts that actually protect the environment, measures like promoting energy efficiency and standards in energy conservation.

We made a promise to lower the cost of living for hard-working Ontarians by reducing hydro costs, and today's announcement is doing just that. When it comes to putting more money in the pockets of Ontarians, we're just getting started. After years of skyrocketing electricity rates, your bills will finally start to come down, and we're cleaning up that mess that the Liberal government made.

In my riding of Sarnia-Lambton, it's not that we're against any type of energy project, because we're not. I'll put this forward: We probably have more energy projects in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton—at one time, we had the largest solar installation in North America, it was touted at the time. It's located just outside of the boundaries of the city of Sarnia. It's within the city of Sarnia but on the outskirts, on prime agricultural land. How that got located there is another story that happened long ago. I won't even blame it on the Green Energy Act. It happened before the Green Energy Act was put in force. But it's a shame, because that land will probably never be returned to agricultural production. It's some of the best land in southwestern Ontario.

We have many NUG plants, as they're called, the non-utility generators. I can think of four that I know of that were built to chase the load in parts of Ontario, because the green energy projects—when the wind didn't blow or the sun didn't shine, as they shut down the coal plants in Ontario, then you needed facilities like these non-utility generators, which are gas-fired, combined-cycle generators, which would generate electricity by burning natural gas, which is the next-cleanest thing, I guess, to nuclear. They were installed, and we have a number of them in southwestern Ontario in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton.

Also, we have at least three cogeneration plants that were built by industry, which run from time to time but not as often as they should.

So I think that in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton alone, it shows we're not against new ideas, new energy concepts.

I see I'm running out of time. I do want to talk about some of the things we're doing in my riding of Sarnia-Lambton to do with the bio industry. There's a whole biotech industry that has grown up in Sarnia-Lambton. We've rebranded ourselves as the green valley. For years we were known as the chemical valley, and we still have a lot of industry there that has cleaned itself up, in the petrochemical refinery industry. But we've got a whole new generation of industry that's coming on board, led by the Bioindustrial Innovation Centre, and we have the Sarnia-

Lambton Research Park in association with the University of Western Ontario, and there are a number of pilot projects. I hope people out there will take the time to come to Sarnia-Lambton and see what we're doing there. We've got some exciting projects. It's not like we're against new ideas; we certainly aren't, Mr. Speaker, and we've proven that. Those projects are starting to take root now.

0910

I was proud to go down to eastern Ontario to the area of Maitland with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Honourable Steve Clark, a number of months ago. In their area, they have a number of brownfield sites there, where a number of major industries used to be located. They've moved out. They're going to try to emulate in the same way what we've been able to do. It has taken about 15 years in Sarnia-Lambton's case, but I'm sure that the area of Maitland, Ontario, should be able to do it a lot quicker because they can see the shortcuts where they can bring this industry there a lot quicker.

Mr. Speaker, like I say, to sum up, the Green Energy Act made it harder for businesses that were in business in Ontario to stay in business, and made a lot of businesses take a second look: Would they relocate here? So I think a number of initiatives that we've taken here in southwestern Ontario and across Ontario with the new open-for-business act and the revocation of the Green Energy Act alone have made a big difference, and I'm sure it's going to lead to better days.

I was in the House when the Green Energy Act was passed in 2009. I remember speaking about it at the time. I don't have my notes here, but I remember cautioning at the time that I didn't see anything good coming out of it. I wish I had been wrong, but I wasn't.

I do appreciate the opportunity to rise here today to speak to this bill. It's always a privilege and an honour to speak in the Legislature on behalf of the citizens of Sarnia-Lambton and southwestern Ontario. At that, I will yield the floor.

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

Mr. Joel Harden: I want to thank the member for Sarnia-Lambton for those comments. I'm going to endeavour, in a minute and 53 seconds, to answer your question. You mentioned that you never had a good answer as to why Ontario decided to pursue renewable energy given that we off-load 23% of our energy when we don't have use for it to the United States, and we essentially pay the United States to take our energy. I take the member's point: That's a ridiculously wasteful system. What's also wasteful, Speaker, which is why the previous government, whose policy I will not defend, attempted to take us down the path of renewable energy, is the waste associated with nuclear power. That's something that I spoke to when I had 20 minutes on this bill the last time I rose in this House, and I invite the member to look at that because what I said was informed by members in my community.

Right now, what the member for Sarnia-Lambton should know is that we are currently looking at a proposal in the Ottawa Valley to build an above-ground nuclear waste

facility the size of 70 NHL hockey rinks 200 metres away from the Ottawa River, which is a source of drinking water for millions of people. There is a cost to maintaining and doubling down on a centralized energy generation system, which is what the government, unfortunately, is poised to do. It may be emissions free, but it's not waste free.

What our children and our grandchildren expect this government to do, expect us to do as a Legislature, is to find a way to embrace renewable energy. What I said in my remarks is that there is, in my view, a way to embrace renewable energy that fits perfectly well within a Conservative policy world view; it's called virtual net metering. It's a policy I've promoted, with my friend from Markham–Stouffville, at the social policy committee. If it was pursued at a co-operative, non-profit level, it wouldn't have the problems associated with the secretive, high-cost model for renewable energy embraced previously.

So, member for Sarnia–Lambton, that's my attempt to answer your question. Let's take up this discussion off-line.

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

Mr. Paul Calandra: I, too, want to thank the member for Sarnia–Lambton for that passionate discourse on the Green Energy Act and all of the reasons why the government needed to move rather quickly to make some changes on how we procure energy in this province. He spoke very passionately about the disagreements within families and farms and communities over how the previous government brought forward the Green Energy Act, and I think we heard a little bit more of that in committee.

While the member opposite, my NDP friend from Ottawa South—

Mr. Joel Harden: Centre.

Mr. Paul Calandra:—Centre—is correct that nobody is going to defend the previous government's Green Energy Act, it is our job, of course, to move forward and to bring on something new. That's what the government has done. Of course, all forms of generation, I think, are on the table, but that generation has to be cost-effective. It has to be in the best interests of the people of Ontario. That's the direction we need to move in.

I think that what the previous government did in terms of how they rolled out the Green Energy Act has done a disservice to our renewable sector. It has really turned them into an enemy—something that can be a positive, but it must be done in a way that is cost-effective and that the people of Ontario can afford to do.

We'll agree to disagree on some aspects of nuclear power. As many of my colleagues know, I'm a big fan and supporter of nuclear power. It provides us the baseline energy that has been so effective in keeping our costs down for so many years.

But ultimately, Mr. Speaker, this is the first step in moving us forward. When you look at what the government has done—the Minister of the Environment working with the Minister of Energy and working with the Minister of Finance—it is bringing together all of the elements we need to get Ontario moving again, to put us back on track,

to make it more cost-effective to do business and to really restore Ontario as the engine of the Canadian economy.

I thank the member for his passion on the topic and I look forward to working with him, moving forward.

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

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was interesting listening to the comments coming from the government regarding the Green Energy Repeal Act. When people come and speak in favour of nuclear energy, you have to respect that people coming from different parts of the province may have different opinions. You will all remember, and you've heard me say in the House many times, that we all know where the Canadian Shield is—this great, big, massive amount of rock in the north of our province. You put a pin in the middle of the Canadian Shield, and you've just put a pin in Nickel Belt. Why do you think people in Nickel Belt are not in favour of nuclear energy? Because we know darn well that this is where they're going to bury the nuclear waste.

The people from Atomic Energy of Canada and the people from nuclear energy are forever going through every part of Nickel Belt to see if there is a willing community who will accept to be—they don't use the term “nuclear waste dump,” but this is what we use in Nickel Belt, because you all know that they are not going to come and ask to bury underneath Toronto. They're not going to go and ask to bury underneath Ottawa. They're going to ask—and sometimes tell us—that this is where they're going to bury the nuclear waste, and it's going to be underneath my pillow. What I don't know is how many feet underneath my pillow, but I don't care how many feet it is. I don't want it there, and the people of Nickel Belt do not want it there.

You have to respect that when we see energy skyrocketing because the Conservatives and the Liberals decided to privatize, and then you see that the forms of energy that are not harmful to health—the green, renewable energy—are being shut down, people in Nickel Belt speak up.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: It's always a pleasure to rise in the House and participate in debate and in questions and comments.

I had the opportunity to speak to this bill a couple of weeks ago. There's one thing that I really took heart from the member from Sarnia–Lambton's comments, and it's the fact that the Green Energy Act put wind turbines in people's backyards who didn't want them. There was no recourse to deal with that, Mr. Speaker.

One of the hallmarks of our country and our province and our democracy is the fact that everybody gets a say. Everybody's voice should be heard. I think one thing that our government is doing very well is that we are listening to the voices of the people of Ontario. It's really important that we're making sure that people are getting what they want and they're understanding why these things are being placed in their backyards. I'm lucky. I don't have any wind turbines in my riding, but if you get out within probably a

20-minute or a half-hour drive from the northern edge of my riding, you run into the wind turbine farm in Mount Forest, and that runs all the way down into Sarnia–Lambton, where the member is from.

0920

There are a few concerning costs that I just want to highlight real quick: We paid \$3.75 billion more on our electricity bills than we should have. I think that's a staggering number, when we look at that. Wind and solar only make up 11% of the power generated here in Ontario, but it made up 30% of the debt retirement charge. How is that a sustainable model? I don't think that that really makes sense. I think a lot of people in Ontario have started to see through that.

In 2016, we dumped over a billion dollars' worth of clean energy just right out of the system, and we've talked about—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We'll return to the member from Sarnia–Lambton for his two-minute summation on what he just heard.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a privilege to be able to rise and reply to the members from Ottawa Centre, Markham–Stouffville, Nickel Belt and Kitchener–Conestoga.

When our government took office, we had made a commitment during the election that this government would put the needs of everyday people first. We promised to respect their hard-earned money and to make sure they got to keep more of it in their pocket, where it belongs. We promised to be accountable to the people who pay those bills day in and day out. We also promised to drive efficiencies in the electricity sector and push energy costs down. More importantly, we promised to restore the public's faith in our election—electricity system, and election system, maybe.

Since day one, we've been working to keep those promises. We listened to people when they told us that they had an issue. We thought about what was wrong with the electricity system. We heard about the negative impacts that it was having on families and businesses.

I do appreciate having had the opportunity to talk about some of the exciting things that we're doing down in Sarnia–Lambton as well as across the rest of Ontario, like down in the Maitland area—I wish the minister was able to be here so that I could speak to him directly. He would rise, I'm sure, and second my comments about the positive image that they had on there. We know the province's families and business were fed up with rising electricity prices.

I do want to add to the comments—I remember when we talked about these wind turbines. There was talk at one time about putting them on the Scarborough Bluffs of Toronto. That soon came to an end because—

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: Yes, it did, because it was a Liberal seat.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, it was a Liberal seat then, and they said no. That didn't happen, so they foisted them upon the rest of the Ontario, who didn't have a say.

I would like to add to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga: The people of Ontario did have recourse, and that was the election of June last. That's when they had their recourse.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is a pleasure for me to rise today to participate in this third reading debate on Bill 34, the Green Energy Repeal Act.

Speaker, I want to begin by commending our critic for the official opposition, the member from Toronto–Danforth, who I think has done an exemplary job of pointing out what's missing from this legislation and also the real impact of this legislation, which, frankly, is minimal. This is a bill that's largely symbolic. While it does repeal the Green Energy Act, it re-enacts almost all of the provisions of the Green Energy Act in the Electricity Act. This notion that through this legislation we are getting rid of the green energy legislation that had been in place before is actually not true, because the provisions of the Green Energy Act that were problematic are really being moved into the Electricity Act.

The biggest problem with this bill is that it gives a sense of false hope, that with this bill, there are some concrete steps being taken to really begin the process of fixing some of the problems that Ontario faces in our electricity system. And, of course, a bill that doesn't address the fundamental issues of privatization and deregulation will do very little to address the problems with our energy system.

This bill will do very little to reduce rates. That has been a focus of this government, this party, during the election: their commitment to reduce hydro rates. If we don't deal with the privatization of our energy system, we won't be able to achieve that meaningful reduction in rates that Ontarians deserve.

This bill won't do anything to return our electricity system to broader public ownership. Certainly, the reason that our energy system started out as publicly owned is because we recognized that there is a substantial public benefit, that our energy system is a critical tool to enable us as legislators to advance the public interest and ensure that energy planning decisions are made in the public good.

The bill doesn't do anything to start the process of winding down the Liberals' Fair Hydro Plan. It's interesting that we are having this debate on this bill at the same time that a committee is grilling the members of the former government on the Fair Hydro Plan. Certainly, members opposite were quite scathing about the Liberals' Fair Hydro Plan at the time that it was introduced, and they continue to be during those committee processes. However, they have had opportunities to start to undo the harm that was done with the Liberal Fair Hydro Plan but have chosen not to. They have instead embraced the Liberals' Fair Hydro Plan lock, stock and barrel.

One of the concerns about this legislation that has been raised by members on this side of the House is the fact that

it singles out renewable energy projects. Certainly, New Democrats agree that municipalities should be able to have veto power over energy projects that are sited in their communities. That is something that is long overdue. However, this bill says nothing about other kinds of private energy projects, for example, gas plants and nuclear projects. Those kinds of energy projects can continue to be foisted upon unwilling communities regardless of this legislation.

It's instructive to look at history to see what happens when municipalities are at the receiving end of energy projects that they do not support. I, for example, am a beneficiary of a disastrous decision that was made by the previous Liberal government to situate gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville, which they later had to reverse course on at a cost of over \$1 billion to the public purse. In my riding of London West, the former Liberal energy minister had to resign in the wake of the gas plant scandal. It helped me be elected in the by-election, which, Speaker, you are well familiar with. So there are political consequences, clearly, to not allowing municipalities to have a say in energy projects.

The other gaffe in this legislation, of course, is that while it allows municipalities to be involved in renewable energy projects, it says nothing about the many other kinds of issues that municipalities should be able to have a say over; for example, landfills. Last week in my riding, I met with Bryan Smith from OPAL. The OPAL Alliance is Oxford People Against the Landfill. It is an initiative that came together in 2012 because of plans to situate a megalandfill in Oxford county. The people of Oxford do not want a landfill in their community. Bryan Smith from OPAL came to my office and provided me with pages and pages of petitions signed by residents of Oxford county who are calling on the province to allow communities the right to approve projects like landfills that are going to be situated in their communities.

0930

This is an important right. Municipalities should have the ability to say yea or nay when there are plans to proceed with major projects like the landfill in Oxford county. I know that the member from Oxford is well familiar with this issue because he introduced a private member's bill, when he was on this side of the House, to give municipalities that right. It's interesting that this bill before us doesn't address any of those other planning issues that municipalities might have an interest—or do have an interest—in participating in decisions on.

I want to say that it's important, as we look at this legislation, to be clear-eyed and realistic about what it will do and what it won't do. Most importantly for the people of this province, it will do nothing to start to reduce the skyrocketing hydro rates that brought down the Liberals, along with the privatization of Hydro One. This bill will do nothing to create that oversight and independent planning that we need in our energy system. It does not restore that independent process that was taken away by the Liberals.

Of course, that's not surprising, because we have seen this government eliminate those independent officers of the Legislature—the Provincial Advocate for Children and

Youth, the Environmental Commissioner, the French Language Services Commissioner—because they don't like these kinds of independent oversight mechanisms. So it's not surprising that they didn't reintroduce that independent planning process that we need.

Ontarians need to remember that this bill is symbolic and will do very little to address the real issues in our energy sector here today.

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

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: Our government promised to be accountable and responsible for the people of Ontario. One of the ways we promised to do that was to repeal the Green Energy Act. With this legislation, I'm pleased to say that we are delivering on that promise.

The Liberal Green Energy Act allowed energy rates to triple, drastically crippling our manufacturing sector. Because of this act, thousands and thousands of jobs were lost in the province of Ontario. Unfortunately, it really hurt all Ontarians.

The Green Energy Act made it so much harder for businesses in Ontario to stay in business. The people of Ontario lost jobs across Ontario because manufacturing plants were too expensive to operate. This government for the people is delivering on its promise to repeal the Green Energy Act, and our government is reducing Ontario's skyrocketing hydro rates.

If this legislation is passed, it would send a strong signal about our government's energy priorities. First, it shows we are committed to helping electricity consumers lower their energy costs. Ontario has enough supply of power right now, and our province does not need power that additional renewable energy contracts would have provided to have reliable electricity.

Secondly, it demonstrates that we are committed to restoring authority to municipalities to ensure they have a say in the siting of renewable energy projects that affect their communities.

Third, it proves that we are committed to retaining provisions that will help electricity consumers lower their energy costs and drive efficiency.

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

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: I wanted to say thank you to my colleague from London West for such sage advice: Let us be clear-eyed and realistic with any of the legislation that we pass. I'm hoping that we're not just going to take that advice when it comes to the green energy repeal but that we'll take that, moving forward.

In this particular bill, the idea that I keep hearing over and over again is that everything that we need to make it effective is actually missing from the bill. It's not the first time that we've had this discussion or this debate.

If people want to make sure that Ontarians receive the decreases in their bills, as promised, then you have to ensure that you address the root causes of what is causing the bills to skyrocket. As my colleague from London West has explained so eloquently, that means addressing privatization and making sure that the proper regulations are

actually in place. If that information is missing from the legislation, it's impossible for us to do good on the promise that was made. I don't entirely understand why, but this seems to be an ongoing discussion with every piece of legislation that comes through the House.

And so, again, I just want to repeat our colleague's message: Let's be clear-eyed and realistic. If the words in the bill are not providing the information that people need to decrease privatization, to stop privatization, to move things into public hands, then we're not going to see the decreases.

I just want to point out that this problem isn't just with this bill; this problem keeps coming up over and over and over again. I do hope that at some point, the government takes the time to be clear-eyed and realistic.

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

M^{me} Natalia Kusendova: Ça me fait grand plaisir de parler ce matin en faveur du projet de loi 34, Loi de 2018 abrogeant la Loi sur l'énergie verte.

Je remercie la députée de London-Ouest pour son discours.

Pendant la campagne électorale du printemps de cette année, chaque candidat du Parti conservateur a fait des promesses aux familles ontariennes. On a promis aux individus, aux familles et aux petites entreprises un gouvernement responsable et digne de confiance, qui écouterait et rendrait l'abordabilité en remettant de l'argent dans les poches des contribuables. Maintenant notre gouvernement tient à tenir ces promesses.

Le projet de loi du gouvernement libéral a fait tellement plus difficile pour les entreprises de rester en Ontario. Les familles ontariennes ont été forcées de choisir entre chauffer leur maison et manger.

Une des premières actions prises par notre gouvernement était d'annuler 758 projets d'énergie chers et inutiles, résultant en 790 milliards de dollars économisés. C'est un important pas envers notre plan pour réduire les tarifs d'électricité de 12 %.

Monsieur le Président, on a entendu ce matin à la radio que les prix de la nourriture et des aliments vont augmenter de plusieurs centaines de dollars en 2019.

Now more than ever, Ontario families are relying on our government to make life more affordable and to keep money in their pockets. To those hard-working families, I am proud to say that help is here. After years of skyrocketing electricity rates, your hydro bills will finally start coming down. We're cleaning up the Liberal hydro mess and making sure that our electricity system works for the people once again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Questions and comments? The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Good morning, Speaker. It's always a privilege taking my place on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin and, of course, seeing you in that chair. You make it look exquisite. You're something else, Speaker. I tell you, you have a presence, I have to say, when you're sitting in the House.

Anyway, I want to go back to the member, where she talked about our critic the member from Toronto-Danforth,

who has brought very thoughtful views in regard to exactly what that bill does. As the member had said, it's a symbolic bill. It really doesn't do anything.

0940

When I hear Conservative members take their seats and talk about how this is going to reduce hydro bills—it's not. It's not. When you look at the biggest error that was done by the previous government that was there, it was their Fair Hydro Plan, which was a \$40-billion boondoggle. They haven't addressed it; they've kept it. Now it's part of their plan. They can't blame the Liberals for that one no more. It's part of their plan, and the ongoing privatization that is going to happen is going to escalate our hydro bills again and again and again.

We've seen this story before. It started way back when, and it is just continuing on with the same type of messaging. If we wanted to do something, I would encourage this government to once again look at our platform—look at it—where we talked about the elimination of time-of-use. Look at doing the equalization of the delivery charges. Now that would reduce hydro bills, and it would be a substantial step forward. But again, we don't hear these ideas, or I'm not sure if the government is listening to those ideas when they keep asking for different views or different opinions in regard to how we could do this.

What this does do is that it creates an economic hardship on a lot of the businesses and communities across my riding in Algoma-Manitoulin, particularly with Wikwemikong First Nation, Elliot Lake and Wawa, who all had green initiatives that they wanted to have pushed forward in order to change the windows, heating and so on and create jobs in their communities. With the stroke of a pen, those are gone.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We'll return to the member for London West for her response.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would like to thank my colleagues the members for Kitchener Centre and Algoma-Manitoulin, as well as the members for Scarborough-Rouge Park and Mississauga Centre, for their comments.

Reference was made to the 758 projects that were already cancelled in one of the first acts of this government. That tells us right there how symbolic this bill really is. Those contracts have already been cancelled. Having this legislation in place will do virtually nothing to change the reality on the ground.

What the cancellation of those projects did, however, is send a very strong signal to potential business investors in this province that you have got to be very careful if you sign a contract with the government of Ontario, because that contract could be ripped up at any moment. That is very troublesome, because it will have an impact on people who are thinking of starting businesses in Ontario.

I want to return to my fundamental point, and that is that this bill will do nothing to address the problems that we saw, beginning with the privatization that was started by the former Conservative government and that was ramped up by the Liberals, the deregulation, the politicization of our energy system that has contributed to skyrocketing hydro rates. This bill will do nothing to prevent the government from making decisions behind closed

doors that are going to have a direct impact on the people of this province.

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

Ms. Donna Skelly: I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak about how our government for the people is making changes to help make the lives of all Ontarians easier by taking important first steps to reduce hydro rates.

Over the past 15 years of Liberal government, we saw families feel the brunt of skyrocketing energy prices and manufacturing jobs leaving Ontario. It's clear that the only people that benefited from the Green Energy Act were Liberal insiders and donors who got rich at the expense of Ontarians making the choice between heating and eating.

This issue is one I have a personal interest in and have followed quite closely for a number of years, and that's because the wasteful and misguided Green Energy Act is one of the reasons I got into politics. When the act was first introduced by the McGuinty government, I was co-hosting a program on CHCH Television in Hamilton called Square Off, where the issues of the day were analyzed and debated. To be frank, I was enjoying a successful career in broadcast journalism. I enjoyed my colleagues, I enjoyed the content that we covered, and I enjoyed spending more time with family and friends than a life in politics might allow.

But there was something disingenuous about the arguments being put forward by the proponents of the Liberal government's Green Energy Act that really got to me. As a mother, as a consumer, as someone who had to manage a household budget, it just didn't add up.

It also didn't sit well with my upbringing. When I grew up in northern Ontario, as I've talked about in this Legislature before, Ontario was growing. We were the economic engine of Canada, and I knew one of the key reasons was our abundant supply of affordable hydroelectricity. It was a huge strategic asset. Our economy depended on it, which is why my sense then and our experience now is that the ideas behind the Green Energy Act were fraught with problems. The more I thought about it, the more I was concerned. Eventually, that concern, along with ballooning deficits and other scandals, would prompt me to run for political office to effect change.

Mr. Speaker, today I want to share three reasons why the Green Energy Act has failed Ontarians, the culmination of which is that the Green Energy Act made it harder for businesses in Ontario to stay open. It simply became too expensive for manufacturers to operate here. An unfortunate extension of this we have seen recently: GM is planning to close up shop in Oshawa by next December.

Since day one, our government has been committed to getting rid of the waste left behind by the Liberals. That is why we cancelled 758 expensive and wasteful projects as part of our larger plan to cut hydro rates by 12%, saving electricity consumers \$790 million.

It's not our responsibility to force communities into doing things they don't want to do. We are allowing our municipalities to decide what works best for them. Bill 34 is intended to give the government the authority to stop the

approval of wasteful projects, and give power to the municipalities to do the same, while maintaining measures that promote energy efficiency and energy conservation. This will allow electricity prices to stay at a level that the people of Ontario can actually afford.

I would like to take some time now to share with the House how the Green Energy Act negatively impacted our province and hence why it needs to be repealed. An executive summary released by the government when the Green Energy Act was first tabled goes into detail about what the Liberals had hoped to achieve. According to this summary, the purpose of the Green Energy Act was to enable all Ontarians "to participate and benefit from green energy as conservers and generators, at the lowest cost to consumers."

The summary also states that "a greater emphasis on conservation and efficiency would be at least 11% ... [to] 32% less expensive." We know this never happened because energy prices nearly tripled under the Liberals. It's beyond belief how prices could increase so much at a time when electricity supply was increasing and demand was decreasing. These sharp increases put Ontario near the top of the list when it came to electricity costs across North America, which in turn would hit the economy with decreased investments due to the extra costs placed on larger energy consumers.

In 2013, the Fraser Institute conducted a study that looked into the effects the Green Energy Act had in our province. They concluded that the act had disastrous impacts on Ontario's energy rates and would seriously threaten economic competitiveness, with investments estimated to drop by nearly 13% in the mining sector and almost 30% in manufacturing.

Our government cannot stand by while our job creators face obstacles that are preventing them from paying for good, well-paying jobs that can provide the boost our economy desperately needs.

Let's look at the study's three main conclusions as to how the Green Energy Act failed the people of Ontario. The first conclusion is that "it is unlikely the Green Energy Act will yield any environmental improvements other than those that would have happened anyway under policy and technology trends established since the 1970s." How is it that a plan that was supposed to be modern and fit for the 21st century is giving us the same results as those from 40 years ago? It really makes you think about what the Liberals' true motive was when it came to passing laws that involved rewarding contracts to people.

The McGuinty-Wynne government's own cost-benefit analysis of the act, albeit confidential at the time, predicted that closing coal plants would yield nearly unnoticeable effects of air quality, which had been improving on a consistent basis since the 1980s. Most types of air contamination had already fallen below the strictest provincial limits by the year 2000.

What's even more interesting is the impact of wind power on emissions. Due to the ever-changing nature of wind power, adding this to the electricity grid requires backup power from natural gas plants. If the Liberals had

their way, we would have had to lose a nuclear plant at the expense of this renewable and gas-fired generation combo. The move could have actually led to a net increase in air emissions, the exact opposite of what the Green Energy Act was supposed to achieve.

Our government has shown that not only are we committed to getting rid of wasteful programs, we are committed to supporting nuclear power and have done so by protecting the jobs of 7,500 people working at the Pickering nuclear plant.

The second point is that the plans implemented under the Green Energy Act are not cost-effective. Rather, it costs 10 times more than an alternative found in a confidential McGuinty government report in 2005, and leads to the same environmental goals as simply closing coal-fired power plants. By using this report to support the Green Energy Act, the Liberals hid the truth from the public, since it never considered or recommended replacing coal with wind or solar power.

According to the Fraser Institute, the confidential report did contain a retrofit option for coal plants that would have led to the same greenhouse gas reductions as closing the plants, at one tenth of the cost of the Green Energy Act and one seventieth if the plan was seen to completion. That means huge savings for taxpayers ranging in the billions of dollars. However, both the Liberals and the NDP decided to vote in favour of a plan that benefited the loyalty of Liberal donors over the best use of taxpayer dollars.

The third point that the Fraser Institute made clear was that the Green Energy Act would not create jobs or grow the Ontario economy. The truth is that the overall effect of the act was an increase in production costs, reduced competitiveness and making households worse off due to the skyrocketing costs. It is astounding that a government would claim that a program as costly as the Green Energy Act would create 50,000 jobs without any formal analysis to base that number on. The Liberals were forced to admit that the jobs created were mainly temporary and their magic number of 50,000 never accounted for job losses from increased costs.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to see that we are standing here in hopes of repealing this. It's one of the reasons I decided, as I mentioned earlier, to run for MPP and I'm honoured to be able to stand here in support of Bill 34 to help make it happen for all Ontarians. I encourage all members of this House to stand up with the people of Ontario who have waited far too long for lower hydro rates and support the repealing of the Green Energy Act.

I move, pursuant to standing order 48, that the question be now put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Ms. Skelly has moved that the question be now put. I am satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I did hear a no.

All those in favour of the motion that the question be now put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question be now put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, this vote will be deferred until after question period today.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Orders of the day. I recognize the Minister of Labour.

Hon. Laurie Scott: No further business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): There being no further business called, this House will stand in recess until 10:30 with question period later this morning.

The House recessed from 0954 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I wish to draw the attention of the House that we have some very special guests with us in the Speaker's gallery from Australia—were that we were all there: the Honourable John Ajaka, president of the Legislative Council of New South Wales, and Mr. Mark Webb, chief executive, parliamentary services of the Parliament of New South Wales. Please join me in welcoming them to the Ontario Legislature today.

Mr. Faisal Hassan: I would like to welcome to the Legislature and Queen's Park today the tourism industry leaders: Janet O'Connell from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario; Suzanne Caskie from Centennial College; Andrew Lind from Muskoka Language International; Donna Lee Rosen from George Brown College; and Joe Baker, who will be joining us a little bit later. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Steve Clark: I apologize; I'm a little hoarse. We had a great by-election win by Michael Barrett last night in Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Speaker, I have an introduction. I want to introduce to you, and through you to members of the Legislative Assembly, the manager of tourism in Brockville and Thousand Islands. I want to welcome to the Legislature Katherine Hobbs.

Ms. Jill Andrew: I would like to welcome our guests from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario—thank you very much for being here: Alexandra Anderson, David MacLachlan, Troy Young, Laurie Marcil, Andrew Siegwart, Suzanne Caskie, Dug Stevenson, Kevin Eshkawkogan, Bonnie Ruddock, Donna Lee Rosen and James Murphy. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

Hon. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to welcome Bryan Plumstead, manager of tourism, county of Grey, to Queen's Park. Welcome, Bryan.

Mr. Stephen Lecce: I would like to welcome Alex Greco from Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. He's here today at Queen's Park. I know Minister McNaughton was looking forward to speaking to the annual conference in November and I'm looking forward to speaking with their GR members this afternoon. Welcome to the Legislature.

Mr. Norman Miller: It's my pleasure to welcome representatives from the Tourism Industry Association, including James Murphy from Explorers' Edge, Dianne Hounscome from Resorts of Ontario, Luke Nixon-Janssen from Deerhurst and Muskoka Tourism, Dave MacNeil

from Festivals and Events Ontario, Laurie Marcil from Nature and Outdoor Tourism, Dave MacLachlan from Destination Northern Ontario, Marty Kalagian from Destination Northern Ontario, Kevin Eshkawkogan from Indigenous Tourism Ontario, Rick Layzell from the Boating Ontario Association, Alexandra Anderson from Camping in Ontario and Minto Schneider from WRTMC. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Good morning. I'd like to introduce Robin Garrett from my riding of Niagara Falls, who is here today with the board of the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I would like to welcome an active member from my riding, Maria Melino—welcome to Queen's Park—and also take the opportunity to welcome our former MP from Mississauga–Streetsville, Brad Butt from the Mississauga Board of Trade.

Mrs. Nina Tangri: Soon we'll be having a school from my riding; Philopateer Christian College will be joining us.

I would like to also welcome the director of government relations at the Mississauga Board of Trade and my former member of Parliament for Mississauga–Streetsville, Brad Butt.

I would also like to give a big thank you to the Egg Farmers of Ontario, whose office is located in my riding, for the wonderful omelette this morning.

Mr. Paul Miller: As the tourism critic, I'd like to welcome all the people from the tourism industry who are here to visit us today at Queen's Park. Welcome.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Today I'd like to welcome two gentlemen from the snowmobile organization of Ontario: Ryan Eickmeier, and accompanying him as his partner in crime is my first staff from when I was first elected in 2004, Mr. Andrew Walasek. Good to see you again, my friend.

I'd also like to—my former colleague Brad Butt. Good to see you again, Brad.

Hon. Caroline Mulroney: I would like to welcome to Queen's Park today the honourable Peter Van Loan, former MP for York–Simcoe.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Simcoe county is really well represented today. I wanted to welcome our MP from Barrie–Innisfil, John Brassard, and also Peter Van Loan in the gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader.

Hon. Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning to you. I'd like to welcome a very good friend of mine from Bay of Quinte Tourism. Dug Stevenson is with us today. He's in the House today. Welcome.

Mr. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: I'd like to take an opportunity to introduce a constituent, Binu Saradakutty, who is also the mother of a wonderful page of ours, Nidhi Kumar, who happens to be the page captain today. I would like to welcome her to the House as well.

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: It's my pleasure to introduce Mrs. Beth Potter, the CEO and president of the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. Welcome to Queen's Park. I'd also like to remind everyone that the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario is hosting a reception in committee room 230 from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. this evening. Welcome.

Hon. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce Michael Vasmer, visiting from University College London and doing a PhD in quantum computing. Welcome to the Legislature today.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And the member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Last but not least, Mr. Speaker; thank you. I'd like to also acknowledge some members from Waterloo region tourism that are here today, including Minto Schneider.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): And we welcome the other guests who have yet to be introduced.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My first question is to the Premier. Tomorrow, General Motors is going to be meeting with US lawmakers about their restructuring plans. These lawmakers have all made it clear that they are not going to throw in the towel when it comes to fighting GM's decisions to move jobs out of their communities. Meanwhile, the Premier's message to GM workers is: It's over; it's done.

Why does the Premier think throwing in the towel is the only option?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: Over the last few days, probably a week or so, I've talked to more GM workers and their families than anyone in the country.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Opposition, come to order.

Hon. Doug Ford: I spoke to the mother of a GM worker this morning. I told her that we're going to be working our backs off and we're continually working our backs off to create new opportunities for GM workers so that they don't have to worry about losing their jobs every two years, because that's what it seems has been happening with GM in Oshawa: Every two years, they're either there for a bailout or they're threatening to close the facility down. We have all hands on deck. We had four ministers at our meeting up in Durham. We had our local MPPs up there. We're reaching out to every major company in the world—

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

1040

Ms. Andrea Horwath: In a joint statement, the two US senators for Ohio made it very clear: They said, “[We] are committed to saving these jobs.” GM workers “have proven themselves time and again, and [we] will continue to fight on their behalf.” They're sitting down with GM tomorrow to fight for jobs in their community. Why isn't the Premier putting up the same fight for workers in Oshawa?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: Everyone in this chamber, especially the leader of the NDP, knows I never walk away from a fight—ever. So what I will be—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Doug Ford: What I will be fighting for, I'll be fighting for lower taxes on every individual and lower taxes on businesses. I'm going to be fighting to get rid of this nasty carbon tax, because you can't be fighting for a carbon tax one day, on a Monday, and then wonder why jobs are leaving on a Tuesday. That's what the opposition is doing. They're continuously fighting to raise taxes and to make sure they have a carbon tax. We just passed Bill 47. It's a great bill to attract new companies—

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Except when overnight the Premier walked away from the fight to save jobs in Oshawa.

The families in Oshawa need a government that will fight for jobs. Instead, they have a Premier who says it's over, it's done. The thousands of people who rely on GM for direct and indirect jobs need an auto strategy. Instead, this government scraps support for electric cars, leaves the position of auto adviser vacant for months and refuses to fight for their jobs.

Why is the Premier refusing to do what every other elected leader across North America is already doing: standing up for the workers at GM and saying, "I'm not giving up on these jobs"?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Speaker: The leader of the NDP will be saying this for the next year. As the jobs are going to be wound down, we're going to be out there creating new jobs, great-paying jobs, secure jobs—because our government is creating jobs in Ontario. We lost 300,000 jobs under the previous administration. The NDP voted 97% of the time with their Liberal partners there.

We have changed the rules in this province about creating jobs. We've lowered the hydro rates. We've ended up getting rid of wasteful energy contracts to the tune of \$790 million, bringing hydro rates down, bringing taxes down and creating an environment so Ontario is open for business.

I was just speaking to the Minister of Finance. He was over in New York, and the best words they've ever heard are those words: We're open for business.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier, notwithstanding the fact that he's making stuff up about the NDP again in his responses. Speaker, the—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I have to ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Withdraw.

The Globe and Mail reported this week that the Premier and Dean French, his chief of staff, are working—working very hard, in fact—to ensure that Toronto Hydro CEO Anthony Haines gets the CEO position at Hydro One. As a Toronto councillor, the Premier was an ally of Haines, supporting him as his salary climbed to \$1.1 million a year. According to the governance agreement with Hydro

One, however, the hiring of the CEO is a decision of the board and the board alone.

Can the Premier explain why Dean French, his chief of staff, is personally intervening to land the job for Haines?

Hon. Doug Ford: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Greg Rickford: The Leader of the Opposition asked a pertinent question. Let's look at the difference between OPG and Hydro One: OPG is a crown corporation; Hydro One is a private company. That's the difference. What's the same about them is that they make their own staffing decisions—so a crown corporation making their own staffing decisions, and a private company making their own staffing decisions.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: According to the Globe report, the only Hydro One directors supporting the Premier's favourite candidate are the ones the Premier installed on the board. Six out of the six independent directors at Hydro One are rejecting the Premier's personal pick and have even hired a lawyer to help them deal with the Premier and his chief of staff.

Why is the Premier so adamant on foisting his hire upon Hydro One?

Hon. Greg Rickford: As I said before, both OPG, as a crown corporation, and Hydro One, as a private corporation, make their own staffing decisions. We've endeavoured to renew the leadership there and reflect a cost savings that matters to the people who pay their hydro bills each and every month.

But I find it interesting that the Leader of the Opposition, the head of the anti-nuclear democratic party, would have gotten involved in the operations of our public utility and cut 7,500 people loose. That's what they campaigned on. We're standing up for those jobs. That's a skilled workforce in Pickering-Uxbridge. We're going to defend those jobs every day. We won't let her have an operational say in our electricity system.

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: What we see a lot of is the government standing up for the Premier's hand-picked friends in high positions.

Once again, the Premier and his hand-picked chief of staff seem to think they can do whatever they want whenever they want and stick the people of Ontario with the bill. We're already paying half a million dollars because the Premier's chief of staff demanded that Alykhan Velshi be fired after a single day of work. Now the Premier wants to meddle in the hiring at Hydro One.

Why is the Premier's chief of staff, Dean French, inappropriately intervening in this hiring process?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Just by way of review, we'll look at the differences and similarities between these two companies. OPG is a crown corporation. It's different from Hydro One, as a private corporation. Those would be the differences. The similarity with respect to human resources is that they make their own staffing decisions.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL POLICE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. Yesterday, we asked the Minister of Community Safety about the serious concerns raised about the Premier's appointment of a new OPP commissioner. iPolitics has just broken a story. They report, "When the top job with the Ontario Provincial Police was posted in October, Ron Taverner couldn't apply, because his rank was too low." Then two days later, the requirement suddenly changed.

Can the Premier tell us if the Premier's office had anything to do with this change, or did the Premier recuse himself from that decision?

Hon. Doug Ford: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: As was reported, there was a change in the qualification request for the ad. But from reading the reports, it was to ensure that more people applied. We wanted to make sure that the best person to head our OPP was going to apply. The hiring firm made that decision, and it's been done.

1050

Frankly, I find it pretty offensive that someone who has spent literally decades in our public service has been suggested that he is not qualified to serve as the commissioner for the OPP. That's what I find offensive.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Well, Speaker, what is shocking is that this minister just admitted that the hiring process was changed so that a certain someone, like the Premier's friend, would suddenly be able to qualify for this job. That's what the minister has just told this House.

People have raised serious concerns about this appointment and the process. Chris Lewis, the former OPP commissioner, has claimed, "The fix was in from day one." Now it looks as though the government literally rewrote the job description so a friend of the Premier could apply for the job.

Will the government commit to a transparent and impartial review of this hiring process for this incredibly important position?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: The independent hiring committee unanimously supported the appointment of Ron Taverner. I was happy to endorse that at cabinet last Thursday. But I want to remind people that it wasn't just about us. Rob Jamieson, president of the Ontario Provincial Police Association: "On behalf of the uniform and civilian members of the OPPA, I would like to welcome our new commissioner. We look forward to working collaboratively with Commissioner Ron Taverner, someone who has such a proven track record in law enforcement."

If I may, Speaker, Bruce Chapman, president of the Police Association of Ontario: "I've known Superintendent Ron Taverner for 30-plus years. He's a hard-working, progressive and dedicated officer. Ron is a great choice to lead the Ontario Provincial Police."

The chief of police for the city of Toronto says the city of Toronto's loss by having Ron Taverner leave is actually the OPP's gain.

He will be an excellent commissioner.

TAXATION

Mr. Rick Nicholls: My question is to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. For too long, the hard-working people of this province were faced with inflated costs that they simply could not afford. With the passing of the Cap and Trade Cancellation Act, Ontarians have finally been able to feel some relief.

While the Trudeau Liberals advocate that a carbon tax is the only viable option to reduce emissions, they fail to see that their tax will once again make life unaffordable. The people of this province need a government that will stand up for them. They need to know that our government will do everything we can within our power to stop the Trudeau carbon tax.

Can the minister tell this House what our government, with the leadership of Premier Ford, intends to do to stop this regressive, job-killing tax from being imposed on our province?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington: Thank you for that question. Our government made a promise to the people of Ontario, a promise to get rid of the job-killing cap-and-trade program. But we did not do that to have the federal Liberals just impose a carbon tax that the FAO says will cost \$648 per family. We didn't get rid of cap-and-trade just to have an even worse carbon tax put in its place.

That's why, under the leadership of our Premier, there are now six provinces across this country that are standing together, standing against the federal plan, most recently the province of New Brunswick, who said last week they will join the court challenge against this unconstitutional, regressive, job-killing tax. We will do everything in our power to stop Justin Trudeau's carbon tax.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's good to know that our government remains committed to doing everything we can to ensure that the hard-working people of our province are no longer punished with increased costs to everything.

Speaker, the province of Ontario has the authority to make decisions on how Ontario will fight climate change. Our government is serious about taking actions against the challenges we face because of climate change. Last week, the minister brought forward our plan that will in fact ensure that we take—what's the exact word? We will hold on to the Paris agreement. Again, can the minister highlight the actions we will take to ensure Ontario's continued progress toward our targets?

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I've never heard the member from Chatham-Kent–Leamington at a loss for words. This is the excitement for our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan. It's a comprehensive plan that ensures clean air, clean water and clean land, but also addresses the challenge of climate change.

We did commit to meet Canada's targets in terms of the Paris accord, Ontario's share of that, which is a 30% reduction by 2030. Ontarians have already made great contributions in that regard—a 22% reduction. We have put a plan together that will constructively and in a common-sense way take that down that extra 8%.

We've also put a plan in place that will make sure that we are taking care of our waterways, that we are monitoring and making people aware of sewage discharges. We've talked about municipalities having a say in landfill. There are many parts of this plan that I look forward to talking about.

The one thing that we promised wouldn't be in that plan and the one thing that Ontarians can count on us to fight, is a carbon tax that's going to hurt families and hurt businesses.

ENVIRONMENTAL OVERSIGHT

Mr. Ian Arthur: Yesterday, we heard from legal experts and environmental experts, including the Canadian Environmental Law Association, the Ontario Headwaters Institute and the former deputy Environmental Commissioner. They warned that the government's decision to abolish the independent Environmental Commissioner would gut environmental oversight and accountability in this province.

Will the Premier listen to these experts and keep this important independent office?

Hon. Doug Ford: Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Rod Phillips: Mr. Speaker, through you to the member: I thank the member for the question.

The changes we've made are going to ensure that Ontario continues to be the only province that has an Environmental Commissioner. Our Environmental Commissioner will be independent through the auspices of the Auditor General.

This reflects our government's need to deal with the fact that we have a \$15-billion deficit, but we'll still maintain the appropriate oversight. The commissioner will be there, working under the Auditor General, to ensure that all the various oversight and other requirements are in place, and that we continue to balance a healthy economy and a healthy environment.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Ian Arthur: That's an interesting answer, because the government just tabled amendments to Bill 57 to provide for potential layoffs to the Office of the Environmental Commissioner.

It looks like the government is planning on some staffing cuts when it comes to the environment. Why is the Premier so afraid of environmental oversight and accountability?

Hon. Rod Phillips: I thank the member of the NDP for the question.

I note that the NDP apparently didn't file any amendments to Bill 57—none. Is that right, Mr. House leader? I guess they don't have any concerns; in fact, none related—

Interjection: No good ideas over there.

Hon. Rod Phillips: No ideas on any of the aspects, and nothing related to the Environmental Commissioner.

Again, the committee will duly consider the amendments and make the decisions, as they should. They will be voted on by this House. But the important aspect is that Ontario will maintain an Environmental Commissioner. That Environmental Commissioner will, in fact, be in the

federal model, the exact same model as the federal government uses, working with the Auditor General. We will remain the only province that has an Environmental Commissioner.

1100

GREENHOUSE INDUSTRY

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Interjections.

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: My favourite minister.

The minister spoke at the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance reception last week and pointed out numerous ways in which our government is supporting the greenhouse sector in areas such as labour, natural gas expansion and reducing regulatory burdens.

Ontario represents almost 60% of the production area for Canadian greenhouse vegetables. Last year, Ontario's greenhouse sector and related value chain supported over 81,000 jobs, enabling the people of Ontario to enjoy fresh Ontario vegetables all year long.

Last week, the minister announced that our government is redesigning funding to ensure it will help the greenhouse sector take their businesses a step ahead through innovation. Can the minister please tell us what steps this government has taken to reduce burdens for greenhouse businesses in Ontario?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I thank the member from Carleton for her important question.

Last week, I was proud to announce that our government has redesigned up to \$8 million in existing funding projects, delivered through the Agricultural Adaptation Council, to help fund more projects and encourage more innovation in the greenhouse sector.

Our government has already taken action to help the greenhouse sector by reducing regulatory burdens in ending the cap-and-trade carbon tax, reducing energy bills for our greenhouse producers. By working with the private sector, we are creating more incentives to expand natural gas to rural and remote communities to assist our producers with their energy costs. Our government continues to press the federal government on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program to have it reflect the unique circumstances of agriculture and food production.

We are committed to working with our greenhouse farmers to continue to promote growth and innovation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: Thank you to the minister for his answer and his support of our greenhouse industry in Ontario.

Greenhouse farmers across Carleton, such as SunTech farms, will be happy to hear about the ways in which our government for the people is supporting them in areas such as labour, natural gas expansion and reducing regulatory burdens. Our investment in the greenhouse sector will result in additional innovative projects occurring in the greenhouse sector; specifically, programs that are accelerated or incremental. It is great that our government was able to work with the sector to make this program more effective.

Can the minister please tell us how we are supporting the needs of the greenhouse industry in Ontario?

Hon. Ernie Hardeman: I thank the member for her supplementary question.

As the member previously mentioned, we're helping our greenhouse sector across numerous areas, such as labour, natural gas expansion and reducing regulatory burdens. Our government is working with our partners in the Ontario greenhouse vegetables and ornamental sectors to make sure we deliver maximum value for our investments.

In fact, Jan VanderHout, chair of the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance, says, "Greenhouse agriculture is a driver for growth and jobs. We are very pleased to be working as a partner with Minister Hardeman to get support for the greenhouse farmers. This funding will help the sector to continue implementing advanced technology, to be more effective as a sector and to benefit consumers."

Our government is proud to work with the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance as well as with all of our other partners in the greenhouse fruit and vegetable and ornamental sectors.

ANTI-RACISM ACTIVITIES

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Last week, Statistics Canada released their annual report on hate crimes in Canada and it was not good. In Ontario, there was a 67% increase in hate crimes last year, well above the rest of the country. These troubling statistics demonstrate the highest number of hate crimes in Canada since 2009.

Mr. Speaker, lip service that there is no place for racism in Ontario is simply not enough. Concrete action needs to be taken. Will this government do the right thing and fully fund the Anti-Racism Directorate so that it can carry out its mandate of ensuring that Ontario is an equitable and safe place for all Ontarians?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: Thank you for the question.

I'm actually very pleased to be able to talk about those StatsCan statistics and the release, because it is important.

Notwithstanding your previous comment, I do actually believe that there is no time and place where anti-racism should be accepted and will be accepted in our workplace—

Interjection: Racism.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: —racism, my apologies, would be accepted in our homes, in our communities and in our workforces. That's why I'm pleased that the Anti-Racism Directorate will continue its important work. We need to have those details in order to make sure we make the appropriate decisions to make sure everyone across Ontario is safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: Now, more than ever, the Anti-Racism Directorate ought to be reinstated. The report clearly states that among the provinces the greatest increase in the overall number of hate crimes was observed in Ontario. Hate crimes against Muslims increased an alarming 207%

last year; against Black Ontarians, it increased 84%; and against the Jewish community, it rose 41%.

This is beyond alarming; it's disturbing. Real action needs to be taken now to combat anti-Semitism, anti-Black racism and Islamophobia. Inflammatory rhetoric is not going to make this reality better. Combatting racism in Ontario must be a priority.

Will the government commit to expanding the Anti-Racism Directorate mandate to ensure that government officials are trained so that they do not pass legislation that perpetuates hate?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: I'm not sure where the rhetoric is coming from, Speaker. I said very clearly that we want to make sure we make decisions with the facts. We will do that with the assistance of the Anti-Racism Directorate. But, again, I will say, we need to make sure that in our schools, in our workplaces, in our synagogues, in our places of worship we protect those individuals who are targeted and subject to hate. It is inappropriate, it is wrong, and we will make sure as a government that we are putting policies and procedures in place to actually make a difference.

Interjections.

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

The next question, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): There's no point of order during question period.

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to ask a question for the member from Thunder Bay—Superior North.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough—Guildwood is seeking unanimous consent of the House to permit her to ask a question on behalf of the member for Thunder Bay. Agreed? Agreed.

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Speaker, my question is to the Premier.

Premier, it is widely reported that your chief of staff ordered police to shut down cannabis dispensaries. Also, a few months ago, there was meddling in Hydro One in terms of the appointment of the CEO. OPG's vice-president: It was reported that Dean French, your chief of staff, ordered his firing, costing taxpayers \$500,000.

When you were asked, your response was that you're not interested in knowing what happened. But this is of concern to the people of this province. How much will Dean French, your chief of staff, continue to cost the people of this province? Is it time, Premier, for you to fire your chief of staff?

Hon. Doug Ford: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Greg Rickford: With all of the respect that I can muster, think of the number of people who were fired because of the incapable, incompetent way that our energy sector was dealt with during a decade and a half of darkness. We've flipped the switch, turned the light on, Mr. Speaker. People in northern Ontario now have better options for energy. We're lowering the price of electricity, lowering the price of gas.

Talk about hiring and firing? Too many people in this province, too many people in our vast region of northern Ontario made choices between heating and eating, made choices as to what activities their kids would go in and where they'd have to move to next because this government put them out of work with the incompetent way they handled the energy sector, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Mitzie Hunter: Back to the Premier: Now Ontarians are wondering how it is possible that your close personal friend Ron Taverner, a superintendent from Toronto, was given the position of chief of police for the OPP. People are writing, concerned about what this means in terms of ongoing investigations into former candidates and the Premier himself, which will not be able to proceed in an unbiased and objective manner, especially given the fact that the Premier's chief of staff has no problem picking up the phone and calling the OPP and ordering them to conduct investigations.

1110

Premier, the people of Ontario are concerned with your government's deliberate abuse of power pertaining to close personal friends and what this will mean for people across this province—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. The Minister of Energy, response.

Hon. Greg Rickford: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, this was a party that destroyed the economic viability of this province. Let's be clear about that. We used to lead this country. We were its economic engine; we are now its fiscal basket case. Thank goodness we have a President of the Treasury Board who stays awake all night worrying about this deficit—but attacking it is what gets him up in the morning, Mr. Speaker.

Every one of our colleagues around this place is going to stand shoulder to shoulder to undo the damage that they did, to make electricity prices more affordable, to ensure that gasoline prices are affordable, and to make sure that that job-killing carbon tax, which the federal government wants to impose on us and which would cost us some true dough, never comes to fruition here in Ontario.

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: My question is for the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Today we have representatives from Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters joining us here at Queen's Park. CME represents 2,500 leading manufacturers across Canada, including hundreds here in Ontario. In fact, they're going to be releasing

a report later today on advanced manufacturing and how to strengthen the sector here in Ontario.

I know our government for the people was elected on a promise to bring good jobs here to Ontario, and a big part of that job is to bring good manufacturing jobs here to Ontario.

Can the minister inform the House of the steps that he is taking and that our government is taking to make sure that we support our manufacturing sector and that Ontario is open for business?

Hon. Todd Smith: That's a great question, and we mean it when we say that Ontario is open for business.

Since we were elected in June, my ministry has been working tirelessly to attract, build and grow manufacturing businesses right here in Ontario. My parliamentary assistants, Parsa and Skelly, have been busy travelling the province talking to people at round tables, and that was how we created the Making Ontario Open for Business Act, which repealed the job-killing legislation that was included in Bill 148. We repealed those job-killing parts of Bill 148 and passed Bill 47.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, Dennis Darby, who is the president of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, said, "The repeal of Bill 148 is a major step toward reducing costs and restoring business competitiveness for Ontario manufacturers."

We're going to continue to cut the red tape in Ontario and bring good jobs back to Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: Thank you, Minister. I'm glad you're working hard to keep Ontario open for business. We know that we would have lost 7,000 jobs in Pickering in the nuclear industry if it was up to the opposition.

It's absolutely staggering that even the previous government could stand idle while our province lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs, good jobs that support Ontario families and communities. These are hard-working people, neighbours of ours who want to own a home and a car and who want to help their kids obtain an education. Failed Liberal policies like Bill 148 made it harder, if not impossible, to achieve these dreams.

Can the minister inform this House what other steps he and our government are taking, and intending to take, to restore our manufacturing sector and bring more good-paying jobs to Ontario?

Hon. Todd Smith: A great question, again.

The Making Ontario Open for Business Act was just the first step in our plan to make Ontario open for business. In the fall economic statement, our government announced that we were going to be reducing red tape by 25% by 2022. That's a 25% reduction in the costs of complying with provincial regulations. We're going to do it without compromising health and safety.

We're going to make Ontario the most competitive destination for investment in North America. Manufacturers are going to move their operations from Ohio and Michigan to Ontario instead of the other way around. There are going to be more good-paying jobs for the people of this province after 15 years of failed Liberal policies supported by the NDP—policies that made it extremely difficult to

build, buy and drive a car in Ontario. We're turning this ship around. Ontario is open for business, Mr. Speaker.

DISCRIMINATION

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is for the Premier. This is a question about the Premier's leadership, Speaker.

We're seeing a disturbing increase in discrimination and the outright promotion of hate. This Sunday, the Premier will be appearing at Charles McVety's event as his special guest in Mississauga. He's even in the promotional material for this event. This would be the same Charles McVety who was condemned by the broadcasting standards council for distorted facts and abusive comments about gays and lesbians.

My question is simple, Speaker: Why is the Premier endorsing this man and his views?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: It has nothing to do with government policy, but, do you know something? I will be speaking to people. I will be speaking to people, taxpayers, who were fed up with the Liberal government and their buddies in the NDP raising taxes to the highest taxes in North America and raising hydro rates to the highest in North America.

Some of those people I'll be speaking to on Sunday were the group of some of the 300,000 people who lost their jobs under the leadership of the NDP and the Liberals in this province. They are so pleased and happy that our government is in power, turning this province around, creating good-paying jobs, lowering taxes and lowering hydro rates, making sure that every single month when they see their gas bill, it actually has gone down. When they're filling up their tank at the gas station to get to the event, guess what? They're paying the lowest gas prices in years. That's what they appreciate. These are people who are fed up with the last 15 years.

Interjections.

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

Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I guess the Premier doesn't think that the LGBTQ community or minorities are taxpayers either in this province of Ontario—pretty shameful, Speaker.

Speaker, I want the Premier to hear some of the hateful rhetoric that McVety has said: "By the way, what is sexual orientation?... You could have an orientation to commit all kinds of things. It doesn't mean that we have to accept it." That's Charles McVety. In other broadcasts, he claimed that Muslims were responsible for the Holocaust, and he referred to Haiti as the "capital for voodoo."

Are these the sort of family values that the Premier plans to support this weekend?

Hon. Doug Ford: Through you, Mr. Speaker: Again, these people are going to be there from all sorts of churches across Ontario. They want to hear from not only myself, but other leaders in the community, how we're going to help them create jobs. These are good Christian people. Maybe he's anti-Christian; I'm not anti-anything.

1120

You know, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Victor Fedeli: How about anti-everything? Anti-police—that one's anti-police.

Hon. Doug Ford: You're right, Minister: We've got anti-police, anti-Christian, anti-military—anti everything over there.

They're anti-business; we're pro-business. We're creating jobs. We're lowering taxes. We're putting money back into the people's pockets instead of the socialist regime that's on the other side of the aisle here.

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

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

Next question, the member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Point of order, Mr. Speaker: As today is the day that you've designated for two questions for members of this side of the House, I am seeking unanimous consent to ask a question on behalf of my colleague from Don Valley West.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South is seeking unanimous consent of the House to ask a question on behalf of the member for Don Valley West. Agreed? I heard a no.

Next question.

NORTHERN ECONOMY

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is for the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. Our government is committed to protecting and creating good jobs in the north, and I'm proud that we've been keeping that promise early on in our mandate. A strong northern Ontario is a strong signal for a prosperous Ontario. That's why we're supporting infrastructure development and creating new jobs in the north to ensure we remain competitive. Our government is going to tear down the Liberal barriers that have hindered the development of the northern Ontario economy.

Can the minister please tell the members of this House how we're creating and protecting good jobs in the north?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Any time I get a chance to speak about northern Ontario and the opportunities that we're creating, of course I appreciate those kind of questions.

We're focusing on communities, we're focusing on industry and we're focusing on academic assets in our vast region. We're supporting things like the township of Carling to support the building of a 9,443-square-foot facility to host family gatherings, conferences and business functions and to serve as an emergency shelter, while helping to create jobs in sustaining that asset. We're investing in forestry operations—forestry operations that are jointly owned by Indigenous communities and private companies. We cut through the red tape so that Harte Gold could expand the sugar zone, and how sweet it was to see all those happy people out there ready to get to work in that mine.

We have a great member of provincial Parliament from Sault Ste. Marie who stood up for those jobs in Sault Ste.

Marie. Now we're going to continue to fund our education system in northern Ontario to create—

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

Supplementary, the member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Ross Romano: Thank you very much to the minister for all your hard work creating jobs for the people of northern Ontario.

Speaker, I know from speaking with employers that in addition to creating good jobs and making Ontario open for business, Ontario also needs to do a better job of giving young people the opportunity to reach their full potential. This includes ensuring that they have the skills necessary to fill the jobs that are being created across Ontario. I know that families and young people want to be able to gain the skills they need in their local communities so that they can continue to build a life for themselves in northern Ontario.

Can the minister please tell us what our government is doing to ensure that young people and job seekers can get the skills that they need for the good-paying jobs in northern Ontario?

Hon. Greg Rickford: Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton: Thank you to the member from Sault Ste. Marie for that question.

They're absolutely right: Ensuring our young people have the skills for the jobs of tomorrow is essential for the prosperity of northern Ontario and our young people. That is why I'm proud that Ontario's government for the people has invested over \$6.5 million at Lakehead University as part of the creation of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Engineering and Sciences. The centre will house laboratories and research centres, a student entrepreneur centre and new Canada research chairs.

In early November, I had the pleasure of visiting Thunder Bay and Lakehead University, and I saw first-hand the exciting efforts to create an even more successful environment for our young people. I congratulate Lakehead University on this new development and look forward to working with them and all of our northern universities and colleges to deliver results for the people of northern Ontario.

SPORTS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Earlier this year, in the fall, I was alerted to a situation that worried me. My office began getting phone calls that a local and very popular year-round sports facility, Players Paradise, intended on selling their property to another company. It's my understanding this recreational facility is now being converted into a marijuana grow op.

This is the only climate-controlled, year-round facility in my riding, and parents are now having to drive their children as far as Mississauga to keep them active in sports.

Will the government do its part to ensure that the people of Hamilton East–Stoney Creek have access to proper publicly owned sports and recreation facilities by investing in a new year-round facility for my community?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you for the question.

I'm not apprised of the details of that specific situation, but the Ontario government is very concerned and wants to ensure that facilities are available for youth to be able to not only participate in sports but also develop the skills and move forward, whether it be continuing in minor league or professional leagues.

But the important thing is that something like this has not come to light to me as yet, and I would love to discuss it with you, perhaps after today's session, learn a little bit more and investigate what exactly is happening there so that we can look into it and provide proper direction and a proper review of it.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Thank you, Minister. One of my main concerns: My constituents have told me that they should not have to depend on a private business—a business that can sell out and move away at any time—for their family's team sports, seniors' fitness programs or even their children's birthday soccer parties.

I'm sure that the local and federal governments and counterparts are more than willing to partner up to construct a publicly owned sports and recreation facility. Will the minister support this endeavour?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you again for that question.

As I mentioned to you, sports is something that is of great interest to the people of Ontario, and also as a way to ensure that our children have opportunities to better their lives, to stay busy and occupied and to learn skills that are necessary later on in life. Whether it be teamwork or whether it be individuals setting goals for oneself—it's important that we have those facilities available. One of the things that our government stands behind is ensuring that we work toward providing those opportunities.

Unfortunately, at this point, I don't have enough information to be able to get back to you, but what I can tell you is, saddled with the debt and saddled with the operating deficit we have, we have to be very careful and very calculated moving forward as to how we allocate funds. But I assure you this is something that is of interest, and it's something that we will look into and see what we can do as a government.

CELEBRATE ONTARIO

FÊTONS L'ONTARIO

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Minister, I learned recently that the application process for Celebrate Ontario 2019 launched, a program that supports local festivals in communities across Ontario. Although there are many members who are aware of this fantastic program, I'm sure many of my constituents may not be familiar with the assistance that this program provides. I have seen countless examples of Celebrate Ontario funding grants that have helped organizations in putting on great events that bring people to our communities from right here in Ontario and around the world.

1130

Can the minister provide the House with more information on the Celebrate Ontario program?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you to the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville for the question.

Fêtons l'Ontario est un programme qui soutient les festivals et les événements en attirant des touristes dans les communautés locales et en créant des milliers d'emplois et en générant des millions de dollars dans l'impact économique de l'Ontario.

This program has been incredible in terms of the results that it has provided. In fact, \$1 of funding from Celebrate Ontario results in almost \$21 in visitor spending.

In the past, Celebrate Ontario has helped events like the Beaches International Jazz Festival, Artfest Kingston and Festival de la Bine de Plantagenet reach their full potential. It will also help the recently announced Tall Ships Festival, which will take place in Brockville next summer.

I could speak more about the positive results of the Celebrate Ontario programs for much longer than the time that is allocated. However, I will, in the supplement, expand on the program.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to the minister for that response.

For every one tax dollar invested, communities benefit from a \$21 return. It's an astounding figure. This program truly seems to exemplify value for money when it comes to spending the taxpayers' dollars in a fiscally responsible way.

I'm also certain that members in this House would love to feel this impact in their local communities as well. Can the minister let us know more about the application process and how organizations that put on events and festivals can apply to the Celebrate Ontario program?

L'hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Par votre intermédiaire, monsieur l'Orateur, je me ferai un plaisir de répondre à cette question posée par le député.

Applications to the Celebrate Ontario program must be completed and submitted no later than Wednesday, January 9, 2019, at 5 p.m.

For 2019, the new Celebrate Ontario application process makes it easier for festivals and events to apply to the program. These changes include a simplified single application form, making it easier for applicants to apply to the program, a streamlined funding formula that's applicable to all festivals and event budgets, as well as funding support that is focused on programming improvements and marketing to tourists.

Nous espérons voir de nombreux événements de partout en Ontario appliquer à cette fantastique initiative, et je souhaite la meilleure des chances à tous les candidats.

SENIOR POVERTY

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: My question is to the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. The Ontario Association of Food Banks' 2018 Hunger Report

was released yesterday, with startling statistics. The number of seniors visiting food banks increased more than 10% over the last year—a rate that is nearly three times faster than the general population. Yet this government has slashed social assistance increases in half and cancelled the basic income pilot.

In the absence of basic income, which would have provided a solution to this problem, what is the minister going to do about increasing senior poverty?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: It's a very important question. But let me be very clear: I don't want to increase seniors' poverty, as the member just asked what I would do to do that. We want to decrease seniors' poverty in the province of Ontario. We want to make sure we can lift more people up.

Let me say, first of all, thank you to the Ontario Association of Food Banks for the important work that they do, particularly at this time of year. The report that I read yesterday was startling. We have already taken measures within my ministry to work with the minister responsible for seniors as well as the minister responsible for housing.

The difference between this Progressive Conservative government and every government that came before us is that we work together in a multi-ministerial way to support the individual, to lift them out of poverty. One in seven people in the province of Ontario living in poverty is unacceptable. It is something that we're going to work towards to make change.

Speaker, I'd be remiss if I did not encourage every member of this House to do what myself and others are doing by having a food drive for their local community, as I'll be doing on Saturday for the Barrhaven Food Cupboard.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Seniors are being pushed further and further into poverty by the rising cost of living, particularly housing. Seventy-four per cent of food bank clients over the age of 65 are rental or social housing tenants, yet this government has decided to cut rent control for new units in the middle of a housing crisis.

Can the minister explain how cutting rent control in the middle of a housing crisis will make life more affordable for our seniors who need to use food banks so they can make their rent, or is she going to suggest that seniors should all be going out and getting a job?

Hon. Lisa MacLeod: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Steve Clark: I want to thank the member for the question, but I do want to correct her. The rent control exemption is not the only thing our government is proposing. Again, I want to make this very clear to the members on the opposite side.

We launched last week a Housing Supply Action Plan. I encourage all members of the Legislature to have a round table and go onto our website at Ontario.ca/housingsupply and give us ideas on how we can create more housing, how we can deal with that supply problem.

I agree, we have a real supply crisis in the greater Toronto and Hamilton areas and if we're going to solve it, we need to work together. Again, I encourage everyone—Ontario.ca/housingsupply—to give our government for

people your ideas. We want to work together. We want to create more housing.

TOURISM TOURISME

Mrs. Belinda Karahalios: Good morning, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Our government's tourism strategy plays a key role in the future of our province and is a significant economic driver. As the minister has mentioned previously in the House, the tourism industry accounts for over 4% of the province's GDP, which contributes more than agriculture, mining and forestry combined. The greater Toronto area alone hosted almost 44 million tourists in 2017, with a total of \$8.8 billion in visitor spending.

Can the minister update the House in respect to the government's tourism strategy?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you to the member from Cambridge for the question.

Notre gouvernement a lancé sa stratégie sur le tourisme lors de l'assemblée générale annuelle de l'association du tourisme de l'Ontario, à Windsor en Ontario.

Going forward, I'm sure TIAO and their partners will have thoughtful insights when engaging in the consultation process.

When we strengthen our tourism sector, it strengthens our economy as a whole. It's an industry that supports over 390,000 jobs and generates over \$34 billion in economic activity.

Notre gouvernement au service de la population est impatient de déployer nos séances de consultation à travers la province dans un futur proche.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Supplementary?

Mrs. Belinda Karahalios: Thank you, Minister, for that response.

It is indeed an exciting time for the tourism sector across Ontario, including my riding of Cambridge. Not only have we launched consultations for a new tourism strategy, but we have also committed to creating opportunity for the economy to flourish, create good-paying jobs and strengthen the visitor's experience.

Would the minister please inform this House as to why it is so important to have a strong tourism strategy that will draw more people to our great province?

Hon. Michael A. Tibollo: Thank you to my colleague for that question.

Our tourism strategy will play a key role in bringing in more international visitors to Ontario to ensure that our local partners have the necessary tools to succeed in achieving our objectives.

Our tourism strategy will ensure that our local partners are heard loud and clear regarding the challenges they face, because it's our job to ensure we implement those changes to further strengthen the industry.

Mr. Speaker, we're making sure that local communities and the people on the front lines also have a strong voice in our consultation sessions. Our government is committed to bringing back jobs and economic prosperity to the

province of Ontario. I can assure this House that under Premier Ford's leadership, our government will work tirelessly to strengthen the tourism industry in the next four years and beyond.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: My question is for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services—and congratulations on your new portfolio.

Yesterday, I met with Julie and Marcel Bellefeuille, who purchased their new Ottawa home from Tamarack Homes. They have black mould, they have leaky walls, they have a cracked foundation and much more. Their home value has dropped by \$100,000—and they're not alone in their troubles.

Tarion is the agency that is supposed to help new homebuyers like the Bellefeuilles get these problems fixed, but Tarion is dragging its heels and they continue to suffer. Tarion is supposed to help when the developer refuses to fix defects.

When will this government do something substantive for the Bellefeuilles? And when will the minister reform Tarion so that it finally protects new homebuyers instead of just developers?

Hon. Bill Walker: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

We always on this side of the House want to ensure that people have the protections they need when they need them. We want to ensure that people's ability to buy a house, a home, a condo—whatever it be—that they have the services, the programs, the protection and the confidence, because that is the biggest purchase that they'll probably ever make in their life.

We want to ensure that the entities within the ministry are always providing value for taxpayer dollars and delivering the quality and service that they expect. We will be working with industry stakeholders and Ontarians to ensure that the appropriate protections are in place for consumers, that the regulatory burden for businesses is reduced, and that organizations and agencies like Tarion are there for people when they need them.

DEFERRED VOTES

GREEN ENERGY REPEAL ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 ABROGEANT LA LOI SUR L'ÉNERGIE VERTE

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for third reading of the following bill:

Bill 34, An Act to repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to amend the Electricity Act, 1998, the Environmental Protection Act, the Planning Act and various other statutes /
Projet de loi 34, Loi abrogeant la Loi de 2009 sur l'énergie verte et modifiant la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité, la Loi sur la protection de l'environnement, la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire et diverses autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have a deferred vote on a motion for closure on the motion for third reading of Bill 34.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1142 to 1147.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): On November 13, 2018, Mr. Rickford moved third reading of Bill 34, An Act to repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to amend the Electricity Act, 1998, the Environmental Protection Act, the Planning Act and various other statutes.

Ms. Skelly has moved that the question now be put. All those in favour of Ms. Skelly's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anand, Deepak	Harris, Mike	Parsa, Michael
Baber, Roman	Hillier, Randy	Pettapiece, Randy
Babikian, Aris	Hogarth, Christine	Phillips, Rod
Bailey, Robert	Jones, Sylvia	Piccini, David
Barrett, Toby	Kanapathi, Logan	Rasheed, Kaleed
Bethlenfalvy, Peter	Karahalios, Belinda	Rickford, Greg
Bouma, Will	Ke, Vincent	Roberts, Jeremy
Calandra, Paul	Khanjin, Andrea	Romano, Ross
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kramp, Daryl	Sabawy, Sheref
Cho, Stan	Kusendova, Natalia	Sandhu, Amarjot
Clark, Steve	Lecce, Stephen	Sarkaria, Prabmeet Singh
Coe, Lorne	MacLeod, Lisa	Scott, Laurie
Crawford, Stephen	Martin, Robin	Skelly, Donna
Downey, Doug	Martow, Gila	Smith, Dave
Dunlop, Jill	McDonell, Jim	Smith, Todd
Elliott, Christine	McKenna, Jane	Surma, Kinga
Fedeli, Victor	McNaughton, Monte	Tangri, Nina
Fee, Amy	Miller, Norman	Thanigasalam, Vijay
Ford, Doug	Mulroney, Caroline	Tibollo, Michael A.
Fullerton, Merrilee	Nicholls, Rick	Triantafilopoulos, Effie J.
Ghamari, Goldie	Oosterhoff, Sam	Wai, Daisy
Gill, Parm	Pang, Billy	Walker, Bill
Hardeman, Ernie	Park, Lindsey	Yurek, Jeff

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): All those opposed to the motion will please rise one at a time and be counted by the Clerk.

Nays

Andrew, Jill	Glover, Chris	Natyshak, Taras
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harden, Joel	Rakocevic, Tom
Arthur, Ian	Hassan, Faisal	Sattler, Peggy
Begum, Doly	Hatfield, Percy	Schreiner, Mike
Bell, Jessica	Horwath, Andrea	Shaw, Sandy
Berns-McGown, Rima	Hunter, Mitzie	Singh, Gurratan
Bisson, Gilles	Kernaghan, Terence	Singh, Sara
Bourgouin, Guy	Lalonde, Marie-France	Stiles, Marit
Fife, Catherine	Lindo, Laura Mae	Tabuns, Peter
Fraser, John	Mantha, Michael	Vanthof, John
French, Jennifer K.	Miller, Paul	West, Jamie
Gates, Wayne	Monteith-Farrell, Judith	Yarde, Kevin
Gélinas, France	Morrison, Suze	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 69; the nays are 38.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Rickford has moved third reading of Bill 34, An Act to repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009 and to amend the Electricity Act, 1998, the Environmental Protection Act, the Planning Act and various other statutes. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard some noes.

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.

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 69; the nays are 38.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): This House stands in recess until 3 o'clock this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1152 to 1500.

DISPLAYING OF FLAG

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Orléans.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Monsieur le Président, it's a unanimous consent, actually, if I can ask a point of order: During my member's statement, I would like to show the Franco-Ontarian flag as I'm reading my member's statement a little bit later on.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Orléans is seeking unanimous consent of the House to display a Franco-Ontarian flag while she does her member's statement. Agreed? Agreed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: It's my honour to introduce Phoebe Wasfy, the principal of Philopateer Christian College in Mississauga. She's arriving; she's going to be in the gallery in a few minutes. Welcome to Queen's Park.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Laura Mae Lindo: "Dear government:

"It's time to do better.

"I've had a lot of people in my riding of Kitchener Centre reach out to tell me that they're worried.

"They say that they are nervous that the Ford government isn't paying attention to the impact of their decisions. I mean, you folks are in charge of us—literally!

"So some people have asked me to reach out with a gentle (but firm) reminder that history teaches us a lot about what happens when we don't use our positions of leadership wisely ... when we let power corrupt our morals and our ethics ... when we don't really lead 'for the people' and just use the tag line instead.

"Aimé Césaire warned us about this in his play, *The Tragedy of King Christophe*.

“And Frantz Fanon warned us about it in his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

“Both of these men taught us that if we aren’t careful—if we don’t listen to the criticism that people have about our decisions—we will begin to lead just like those leaders we spent our lives complaining about.

“More recent leaders have also warned us of the same.

“Do you remember when Brian Mulroney confronted Liberal leader John Turner about the same thing in a 1984 debate? You know, when they were debating patronage appointments? Brian Mulroney said “You had an option, sir, to say, “no.” And you chose to say, “yes” to the old attitudes and the old stories of the Liberal Party.’

“Crazy, isn’t it?

“It’s time to do better. Our children are watching.

“Respectfully,

“Laura Mae Lindo, MPP, Kitchener Centre.”

HEARTBEAT OF THE YELLOW RIVER

Mr. Billy Pang: On Saturday, November 24, I attended the Chinese Collective Arts Association’s annual show entitled *Heartbeat of the Yellow River*. The event took place at the Flato Markham Theatre in my riding of Markham–Unionville. It was an excellent showcase of a traditional form of Chinese culture, but also contemporary interpretations, performed by young Chinese Canadians.

The Yellow River is one of the longest rivers in the world and runs through nine provinces in China. Chinese civilization is believed to have developed and originated around the Yellow River, which is the reason why it is so highly regarded in Chinese heritage.

Mr. Speaker, the *Heartbeat of the Yellow River* gala was a special event for me because it showed me that traditional Chinese culture is not only being preserved by young Chinese Canadians but is also reshaping itself to reflect the experiences of young people who identify with both their Chinese ancestry and Canadian nationality.

To live and serve in Ontario, which not only upholds diversity but champions it, brings me a great amount of joy and honour.

SEASON’S GREETINGS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, I’m in a bit of a legislative haze

We’ve been here something like 150 days

And there’s some rhyme, but no real reason

Why we tend to get a little silly as we approach the holiday season.

So listen up, and you’ll hear it

I’m finally getting into the Christmas spirit.

Now, some MPPs already have their Christmas lists

And yes, some are asking for edible cannabis.

Ah, the holidays, whether you celebrate them or not.

In this House we have been dealing with recreational pot.

Now, no one claims to be smoking that wacky tobaccy

Lest we get hauled away by our Sergeant-at-Arms, the non-partisan Ms. Jackie.

But for some, it is with sadness

That we’ve hopped aboard this reefer madness.

I mean, first the Premier cancelled our summer vacation

And Speaker, they’re always imposing time allocation

And doing all of those standing ovations.

And then, someone with a lust for power

Kept us here late, well past the midnight hour

Passing laws with no restitution

Challenging the Canadian Constitution.

A coherent agenda has been a puzzle

Ministers, at times, somewhat muzzled.

Still, the government House leader, the Quinte Grinch,

Won’t let up, not even an inch.

The new year promises to be even harder

Especially if we see more challenges to the Canadian charter

And for that I am at a loss.

Why do we have all of this legislative chaos?

And as you know, there’s always one gift that’s impossible to find

Speaker, if you don’t mind, this year

I’m guessing it’ll be that elusive buck-a-beer

I just can’t find it anywhere.

Oh, gosh darn it

I forgot to say “Merry Christmas” to you, Speaker, the gracious Ted Arnott.

And before my memory completely fades

Just like that Liberal bill on cap-and-trade

To all the MPPS and the staff in the hall

And the pages on the left and right

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Thornhill.

SEASON’S GREETINGS

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Sung to the tune of White Christmas.

I’m dreaming of a balanced budget

Just like the ones we used to know

Where the ledgers glisten, and bureaucrats listen

To messaging from the PO—that’s what we call the Premier’s office around here.

I’m dreaming of a province “open for business”

With every government bill we write

May your investments be merry and bright

And may all your red tape turn to white.

I'm dreaming of reduced traffic
 With every trip that I take
 May our roads be clear and bright
 And may all our subway plans get a green light.

I'm dreaming of a PC Christmas
 Just like the ones we used to know
 With friends we hold dear
 And plenty of good cheer
 With help from lots of drinks like buck-a-beer.

Mr. Speaker, I want to wish everybody a merry Christmas, a happy Hanukkah, a happy new year and a happy Kwanzaa. I always talk about the Jewish community here, and I have to say that “White Christmas” was written by Irving Berlin—his father was a very famous cantor—and at least half of the very-well-known Christmas songs were written by Jewish composers. I think I mentioned once here in the Legislature that I believe that if you could ask them, if they were still alive, “Why did you all write so many Christmas songs?” they would say, “It’s a living.”

LABOUR DISPUTE CONFLIT DE TRAVAIL

Mr. Joel Harden: This past Saturday, 14,000 people took to the streets across Ontario to oppose the direction this government has charted out for francophone rights.

La plus grande manifestation a eu lieu dans mon comté au centre-ville d'Ottawa, où 5 000 personnes se sont rassemblées à l'hôtel de ville dans le froid du 1^{er} décembre.
 1510

One of the people I met there was the great Jean-Claude Parrot, the former president of the postal workers' union of Canada. My esteemed colleague has thrown down a poetry challenge that our friend from Thornhill has picked up, so I'll end with a tribute to Jean-Claude. It's taken from a book; it's one of my children's favourite books. It's called the Great Reindeer Rebellion.

'Twas the night before Christmas, and somewhere up north,
 Dear Santa was frantic—he paced back and forth.

He had just heard news that he sure didn't like:
 It seemed that the reindeer were going on strike.

Oh, no! Yes, Dasher and Dancer,
 and Prancer and Vixen;
 Even Comet and Cupid;
 and Donner and Blitzen!

They said, “We are finished!
 We've had quite enough
 of pulling your sleigh with
 such big, heavy stuff!...

No pulling or flying, Santa.

We're in this together!”

With that, Speaker, I'll just note that our friends who work for the federal government, the Canadian postal workers' union, have just been legislated back to work. The truth of that particular labour dispute that our friends at the federal government level have mismanaged is that too many postal workers this holiday season are going to be hurt in the course of work. I hope the message that they hear, loud and proud, from the people here in Ontario is that people in Ontario support postal workers. They support people delivering presents this holiday season. If the federal government turns its back to you, in Ontario we treat you with love.

EVENTS IN OTTAWA ÉVÉNEMENTS DIVERS À OTTAWA

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: First, I would like to start by congratulating the new 2018-2022 city of Ottawa council, which I had the pleasure to attend the inaugural ceremony of last night.

J'ai bien hâte de travailler avec les nouveaux conseillers de ma circonscription d'Orléans : Laura Dudas, quartier Innes; Matthew Luloff, quartier Orléans; et, pour un 3^e terme, Stephen Blais, quartier Cumberland.

I was also very proud to know that during the month of November, four of my constituents were honoured. Brian Tardif and Marie-Claude Doucet received the Order of Ottawa, while Aldège Bellefeuille was presented with the Brian Killrea Award for Excellence in Coaching on November 22, alors que Trèva Cousineau fut décorée le 16 novembre du Prix d'excellence de l'Ontario pour les personnes âgées pour sa contribution exceptionnelle auprès de la communauté francophone.

Et je ne pourrais passer sous silence, monsieur le Président, le moment le plus touchant, qui a été certes ma participation au grand rassemblement de la résistance samedi à Ottawa. J'y étais avec mes collègues John Fraser et Nathalie Des Rosiers, et accompagnée d'environ 5 000 personnes à Ottawa.

Dans plus de 40 endroits, les francophones et les francophiles de l'Ontario se sont retrouvés pour demander le droit de conserver nos acquis en francophonie. Nous avons crié haut et fort notre solidarité pour l'indépendance du commissaire aux services en français et son commissariat, et on exige une première cohorte pour l'université en 2020.

Nous sommes, nous serons.

CHRISTMAS BASKETS

Mr. Will Bouma: For more than 50 years, Christmas Baskets has been providing food for a holiday dinner and children's toys to families in Brant county, Brantford and Six Nations.

First-day registrations for Christmas Baskets were at near-record levels as the holiday program got off to a late

start in Brantford–Brant. Two 50-foot trailers filled with tables, desks and cardboard boxes with toys and other items have been unloaded, and staff have finally secured a home to operate this year's program, which delivers baskets of food and other Christmas goods to more than 1,500 local families in need. Registration for the baskets usually begins November 1.

Christmas Baskets staff began looking in October, but no space could be found for the program. A deal was finally struck to use space in the former Sears store at the Lynden Park Mall.

Groups of volunteers, eager to get to their holiday work, already had many boxes unpacked. The tables were starting to be filled with new and used toys, knitted wear and small gifts for parents. Shopping carts wrapped in tinsel were laden with other items still to be organized.

The entrance for Christmas Baskets is at the rear service entrance door of the former Sears store. Donations of toys can be dropped off there.

Registration is open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday. To register, valid identification must be shown for each member of a household as well as proof of income and address. For more information about registration, call 519-751-4357 or 519-751-0000.

CHILD ADVOCATE

Mr. Faisal Hassan: Last month, we received the devastating news that the Ford Conservatives plan to eliminate the office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The office of the child advocate is essential to the health and safety of Ontario's most vulnerable children, because their mandate is proactive, not reactive. This is the difference between saving children's lives and asking "why" once it is too late.

As one of the child care practitioners in my riding wrote to me last week, "The office of the child advocate listens to the voices of children and youth and is integral to the work that needs to be done to increase safeguards for this vulnerable population and help us do our jobs better. This is not a luxury item; our children and youth deserve to be heard and protected."

Yet as the Conservatives argue that Ontario is too poor to provide this essential service for our most vulnerable children, they are providing a \$275-million tax break for themselves and their wealthy donors.

This decision is another in a disturbing pattern of silencing young people and depriving them of critical information and resources. It begs the question whether cutting the advocate for children and youth is intended to save money or to prevent independent scrutiny for this government's harmful policies.

HOLIDAY TOY AND FOOD DRIVE

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: As this year comes to a close and the holiday season approaches, it's time that we start thinking about others. 'Tis the season to give and the season for the people.

This year, my office will be hosting a holiday toy and food drive for those in need in our community. We have partnered with the Salvation Army and the Mississauga Food Bank this year for our holiday drive. Hit it, Sam.

Sung to the tune of Santa Claus is Coming to Town.

You better watch out, you better not cry
You better not pout, I'm telling you why
MPPs are comin' to town

They're making them bills, they're checking them
twice

They're gonna bring down the hydro price
MPPs are comin' to town

It's time that we all get off that naughty list and onto the nice one. You can drop off unused and unwrapped toys and non-perishable food items to our constituency office. Now, let's come together and celebrate this season the way it was intended to be celebrated: together. Happy holidays.

HUNTING AND FISHING LICENCES

Mr. Mike Harris: I'm sorry to disappoint you, Mr. Speaker; I won't be singing my member's statement today. But I will say that I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise today and speak about our government's recent hunting and fishing announcement. We have officially launched online sales of Outdoors Cards and hunting and fishing licensing products via our huntandfishontario.com website.

Along with the countless anglers and hunters who populate my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, I share an enthusiasm for the outdoors. Some of my fondest memories growing up were fishing with my father and grandparents on Lake Nipissing in northern Ontario. I look forward to creating many new memories with my own children.

Streamlining this process to acquire fishing licences or game tags here in Ontario will make it easier for more people to get outside and enjoy the natural beauty of our province.

I think the most convenient aspect of the initiative is the fact that consumers can now have access to a single Outdoors Card. The online portal is a one-stop shop for Outdoors Cards, fishing licences and small-game licences. I love one-stop shops, Mr. Speaker. My private member's bill, Bill 50, will increase consumer access by allowing motor vehicle dealers to register sold vehicles for their consumers online as well, and I'm very happy our government is prioritizing this.

My riding is loaded with rod and gun clubs—seven of them, to be exact. In Waterloo region, there are a total of 10 hunting and fishing clubs and 15 outdoors stores. They all stand to benefit from a more streamlined and efficient process.

On top of moving hunting and fishing licensing online, our government has also recently announced that members

of the Canadian Armed Forces—past and present—will be enjoying free recreational fishing in early 2019.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our members' statements for this afternoon.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Guelph on a point of order.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding a late show scheduled for tonight.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Guelph is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to put forward a motion without notice regarding a late show scheduled for tonight. Agreed?

Interjections.

1520

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry. I'm going to do it one more time, and this time it counts. Agreed? Agreed.

You can move the motion.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I move that the late show I requested, which has been scheduled for tonight, be moved to tomorrow, Wednesday, December 5.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Schreiner is moving that the late show scheduled for tonight be moved to 6 p.m. tomorrow night.

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

Motion agreed to.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Stephen Lecce: I move that, on the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Ms. Simard is replaced with Mr. Coe.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Mr. Lecce has moved that, on the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly, Mademoiselle Simard is replaced by Mr. Coe.

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

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

FRENCH-LANGUAGE SERVICES

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'm pleased to present this petition today on behalf of francophone residents in my riding of London North Centre.

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que la décision du gouvernement de dissoudre le Commissariat aux services en français et d'annuler le projet de la création de l'Université de l'Ontario français met les Franco-Ontariens en péril; et

« Whereas the government's decision to cut the French Language Services Commissioner and to cancel the francophone university in Ontario hurts Franco-Ontarians; and

« Attendu que les Franco-Ontarien(ne)s qui, jour après jour, doivent se battre pour maintenir leurs droits d'avoir accès à des services et l'éducation dans la langue officielle qui est la leur; et

« Whereas Franco-Ontarians are fighting to uphold their rights to access services and education in their language; and

« Attendu que les Franco-Ontariens occupent une place importante en Ontario et méritent d'avoir leurs droits linguistiques constitutionnels respectés, protégés et défendus;

« Whereas Franco-Ontarians are an important part of Ontario and deserve to have their constitutional language rights upheld and protected;

« Nous, soussignés, pétitionnons l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario de :

« Rétablir le Commissariat aux services en français et remettre sur les rails le projet pour une université francophone;

« We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly:

« To restore the French Language Services Commissioner and the francophone university.»

I'm pleased to support this petition and will be affixing my signature and giving it to page Jack.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: J'ai une pétition des résidents d'Orléans qui s'intitule, « Prenons notre place : Redonnez-nous nos acquis ».

« À l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario :

« Attendu que la présence francophone en Ontario remonte à plus de 400 ans;

« Attendu que plus de 622 000 personnes dans la province s'identifient comme francophones et qu'ils méritent de préserver leurs acquis et ce dans un contexte de situation linguistique minoritaire;

« Attendu que l'énoncé économique présenté par le gouvernement conservateur de Doug Ford le 15 novembre 2018 s'attaque aux acquis de la communauté francophone par l'abolition de deux de nos institutions : le poste de commissaire aux services en français et l'Université de l'Ontario français;

« Attendu que l'élimination du Commissariat aux services en français et son indépendance diminue la protection des droits linguistiques de la minorité et met en péril les mécanismes de surveillance et son pouvoir d'enquête envers les communautés francophones et francophiles de l'Ontario;

« Attendu que la jeunesse francophone est en droit d'exiger la poursuite de leurs études postsecondaires dans leur langue dans un milieu favorable à leur développement et épanouissement social;

« Attendu que la communauté franco-ontarienne est en droit de se doter d'outils collectifs afin d'assurer sa pérennité et son développement;

« Attendu que la population de l'Ontario veut conserver les acquis en francophonie et demande rien de moins que le statu quo au gouvernement Ford;

« Nous, soussignés, présentons une pétition à l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario comme suit :

« Que tous les membres de l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario défendent les droits linguistiques des francophones en Ontario et réclament que le Commissariat aux services en français de l'Ontario et son indépendance ainsi que l'Université de l'Ontario français soient rétablis immédiatement. »

Il me fait bien plaisir d'y apposer ma signature et de la remettre au page Vincent.

ANIMAL PROTECTION

Mr. Toby Barrett: I continue to receive petitions organized through Whispering Hearts Horse Rescue titled "Animal Protection in Ontario."

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas all animals in Ontario deserve our protection but are largely going unprotected at this time;

"Whereas the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPCA) is the only agency in Ontario authorized to enforce animal protection laws;

"Whereas the OSPCA has continually cut back services, including the recent decision to stop investigating incidents involving farm animals, including horses, as well as failing to fully investigate poorly run zoos, dogfighting operations, puppy and kitten mills and even documented cases of dogs being tortured in the city of Toronto;

"Whereas the OSPCA has made itself completely unaccountable to the public by eliminating annual general members meetings and board elections as well as eliminating a government representative from their board meetings;

"Whereas the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services provides an annual grant to the OSPCA of \$5.75 million of the public's dollars, for which the OSPCA is to provide province-wide coverage and other services which the OSPCA has failed to deliver;

"We, the undersigned, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to exercise its authority, through the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services under the current funding transfer payment agreement and the OSPCA Act, requiring that:

"—through the OSPCA Act the government annul the bylaws of the OSPCA;

"—a new bylaw be required that re-establishes annual general members meetings, open board elections and a government representative attending board meetings;

"—the government immediately suspend funding to the OSPCA and conduct a forensic audit of the organization's use of public funds;

"—the government conduct a service delivery audit of the OSPCA relating to the enforcement of the OSPCA Act;

"—recognize the important job of animal protection by creating a more accountable system that ensures the immediate and long-term protection of the millions of animals who live among us."

I affix my signature to this petition.

TORONTO TRANSIT COMMISSION

Ms. Jessica Bell: "The TTC Belongs to Toronto...."

"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 ... the TTC."

I fully support this petition. I'll be affixing my name to it and giving it to page Emily.

GUIDE AND SERVICE ANIMALS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Petitions? The member for—oh, South Glengarry and all the other ones that go in front of it.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Well, it's kind of close—the most important one.

Again, I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario Regulation 429/07 under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 indicates, 'If a person with a disability is accompanied by a guide dog or other service animal, the provider of goods or services shall ensure that the person is permitted to enter the premises with the animal and to keep the animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises;' and

"Whereas the Ontario Human Rights Code speaks to the 'duty to accommodate persons with disabilities ... in a manner that most respects the dignity of the person;' and

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"Whereas, despite these provisions, many who require, have been medically recommended for and own professional, trained service dogs, including children with autism, PTSD sufferers and others, continue to be denied access to public places; and

“Whereas service dogs perform a series of vital tasks to support those living with disabilities, including serving in guidance, seizure response, mobility assistance, autism and PTSD support, among other medically acknowledged services; and

“Whereas there are cases where children who rely on a service dog are not allowed to bring them to school; and

“Whereas ongoing denial of access means those requiring service dogs are continuing to face further hurdles beyond the impacts of disability to be allowed the public accommodations they deserve;

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

“Open access to registered service dogs and owners:

“Reintroduce the Ontario Service Dog Act, to end continued discrimination and ensure those requiring service dogs are no longer denied the essential public access they should already be guaranteed.”

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

TRAFFIC CONTROL

M^{me} France Gélinas: I would like to thank Lise Mayotte from Wahnapiatae in my riding for this petition. It reads as follows:

“Intersection of Highway 17 and Highway 537.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas residents of Wahnapiatae are concerned about the safety of the intersection of Highway 17 and Highway 537 and would like greater traffic control measures in place to prevent further accidents and fatalities; and

“Whereas an accident that occurred on October 1, 2017, resulted in loss of life; and

“Whereas two different accidents occurred on October 13, 2017, that involved multiple vehicles and closed Highway 17 for seven hours, delaying traffic; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has jurisdiction over highways and is responsible for traffic safety in Ontario”;

They petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“That the Ministry of Transportation install traffic control measures such as a flashing light at the intersection of Highway 17 and Highway 537 to enhance traffic safety.”

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

INDEPENDENT OFFICERS OF THE LEGISLATURE

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I have a number of petitions here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Child Advocate, Environmental Commissioner, and the French Language Services Commissioner are independent officers of the Legislature who provide indispensable services to the people of Ontario;

“Whereas these independent officers are essential to provide oversight, hold government accountable and offer protections for the people of this province;

“Whereas each of these officers’ work has led to reforms that have been of great benefit to people;

“Whereas budgetary and investigative independence is essential for these positions to be effective and accountable to the public;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reinstate the Child Advocate, Environmental Commissioner and the French Language Services Commissioner as stand-alone independent offices with all their prior duties intact.”

I support these petitions. I will sign them and ask page Georgia to bring them to the table.

VETERANS MEMORIAL

Mrs. Amy Fee: My petition is in support of constructing a memorial to honour our heroes.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas over 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members served in the war in Afghanistan including the 159 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice; and

“Whereas the Premier made a commitment to the people of Ontario to build a memorial to honour the bravery and sacrifice of our armed forces; and

“Whereas, by remembering their service and sacrifice, we recognize the values and freedoms these men and women fought to preserve; and

“Whereas the memorial will show our gratitude to our veterans, their families and to their descendants; and

“Whereas the memorial will be a place of remembrance, a form of tribute, and an important reminder to future generations of the contributions and sacrifices that have helped shape our country;

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

“That the government of Ontario immediately construct the memorial to honour the heroes of the war in Afghanistan.”

I fully support this petition. I will be affixing my name to it and handing it to page Emily to bring to the table.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I am proud to present this petition on behalf of Cecil Forrest from Perth.

“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 this petition and give it to page Rham to deliver to the table.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

Mr. Deepak Anand: This is a petition to support Sarnia’s permanent residential withdrawal management facility.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas, like many Ontario communities, the toll that drugs and alcohol have taken on Sarnia–Lambton is tremendous, but we have hope and importantly, we have a plan;

“Whereas a proposal for a permanent withdrawal management facility has been developed with input from many organizations in our community using the most current research available on withdrawal management;

“Whereas our plan is a vision of teamwork: a one-stop hub for addictions services, improving access to services and bringing care partners together for a team approach to caring for our community;

“Whereas a permanent facility would provide day, community and residential withdrawal management services, stabilization services and wraparound services for people who are battling their addictions;

“Whereas there is currently a temporary location providing some of these much-needed services but together we can provide better care and improve access to treatment for clients;

“Whereas our need is urgent, our plan is in place;

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

“That members of the Legislature please help us save lives and support our community members by supporting permanent withdrawal management services in Sarnia–Lambton.”

I am happy to sign and give it to page Samara.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. The time for petitions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ACCESS TO NATURAL GAS ACT, 2018

LOI DE 2018 SUR L’ACCÈS AU GAZ NATUREL

Resuming the debate adjourned on November 29, 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): When we last left off, I believe the member from Scarborough–Rouge Park was at the questions and comments stage. I recognize the member for Scarborough–Rouge Park.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield):

Okay, questions and comments?

Mrs. Amy Fee: I rose to speak on this bill last week, and I really wanted to highlight, when I did, the fact that we were elected on a very clear mandate: to make life more affordable for families and to also ensure that Ontario was open for business. I stated last week that, to me, this bill does both. It’s making life more affordable for those families that will have access to natural gas, but it’s also ensuring that our rural and northern communities and our First Nations are open for business by getting natural gas access to those communities.

Something that I wanted to highlight again comes from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. They have been quite vocal in support of what we are doing and they have been quite vocal for a long time that communities across this province need access to natural gas.

The president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Mr. Keith Currie, has stated, “Energy is one of the largest inputs on farms,” and that rural Ontario needs access to natural gas to help boost the competitiveness of these communities, businesses and farms. He has also declared that “natural gas is the single most important investment that will deliver a competitive edge to continue to drive growth in rural Ontario.”

The OFA has also said something that really kind of hit home with me about extra money that will be in the pockets of families in rural Ontario. They stated, “If natural gas were available across the province, it would free up ... over \$1 billion in annual energy spending and greatly boost business opportunities.” That’s an extra \$1 billion in disposal income across rural Ontario.

The OFA has also stated that, “Rural Ontario and our agri-food industry is alive with innovation, opportunity and economic potential—and the more success in its rural areas, the better and more prosperous everyone becomes across the province.”

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That is why this bill is so important to ensure that we have natural gas access across the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): I apologize for my confusion earlier. I wasn’t here when the member for Scarborough–Rouge Park finished, and then we went to the questions and comments stage.

We continue with questions and comments, and the member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. When it comes to Bill 32, on access to natural gas, I’ve had the opportunity to listen to what the member has to say, but I can’t help but continue to put on the record that if you do this to help northern and rural communities, then you have

to say so in the bill; otherwise, it becomes harder and harder to believe this. Do people in northern and rural communities want access to an affordable source of energy? Absolutely. We all know what our hydro bills look like. The Conservatives started privatization, the Liberals put it in high gear, and now we have hydro bills that have doubled and tripled and that people can't afford.

It is northern Ontario. It is winter. We all have to heat our homes. We want affordable sources of energy, and natural gas is one such thing. But when you look at the way that the bill is structured, where a developer will have access to one dollar out of everybody's bill every month to expand those projects, one dollar out of everybody in Nickel Belt is not going to build anything in Nickel Belt. We know that.

When they say that 70 new areas will have access to natural gas, name them, because there were projects that were supposed to be funded in Nickel Belt. They were funded by a \$100-million government investment into making sure that rural and northern areas that needed them the most were getting them. But we're not going to go with the communities that need them the most; we are going to go with the communities where there is the most money to be made. That does not include Nickel Belt, Speaker.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: I've had a lot of opportunity now to speak about the natural gas expansion that we're going to be going through here in Ontario. To the member for Nickel Belt's point—and I mentioned this last week when we were debating this—I will make sure of and I will fight for gas expansion in northern Ontario as well. I know that the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka will also be very—I'm lumping you in too, yes. He'll be very interested to make sure that we're seeing this expansion north of Barrie and into other parts of rural Ontario.

I just wanted to read a quick quote from the CAO of Wellesley township in my riding, Rik Louwagie. I had talked about this previously when I did my original debate on this a few weeks ago. It says, "The lack of natural gas" access "is one of the stumbling blocks that keeps businesses from opening in the township. Better access could help level the playing field if they had the same resources available as other centres do."

When we talk about Wellesley township, the stats show that about 20% of homes and businesses—that roughly translates to 800 to 900 properties in Wellesley township—do not have access to natural gas. When we look at the savings that an average household can look to achieve from this, when we're saying that they could save up to \$2,500, imagine what a large agricultural business that is, say, using propane to dry corn could achieve and the savings that could then be translated into more jobs and putting more money back into the economy.

I think that's what our government stands for. We're here and we've said numerous times now—we've got the signs to prove it—Ontario is open for business, and expanding natural gas is a key part of that.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: This is the party which is the architect of the destruction of hydro in this province. Here we are, and they're tampering again with energy. In my community of Humber River–Black Creek, homeowners and seniors are struggling to make ends meet paying gas bills. This government here is patting themselves on the back for getting rid of a grant and of control, and allowing the gas industry to basically go and put pipes wherever they want; we don't know where they're going. The rates are going to go up, and what do you think is going to happen? They're going to look at the government and say, "Why are my gas rates out of control?" Then this government will have to explain this at some point.

Again, we were locked out of discussions. We weren't able to make any amendments. Everything that was suggested by the NDP, by the opposition, was ignored, as usual. But this has been the way that this government seems to progress: without any consultation and without any respect. I may hazard to say that even amongst their own members, decisions seem to be made by a very small number of people, and then members of the government itself are often caught unaware and suffer for that. I am very fearful of the future, when they are going to be tampering with these gas prices, providing no details to the public. Communities across this province are going to see increases eventually in gas prices, and make no mistake: The origin was here.

I don't believe that this is about providing access to natural gas to small, remote communities, at least for this government. This is about developers building on farmland eventually and having access to that. That's what it's about. That's why, at their announcement, you had the home builders' associations there, not the agricultural industry. I guess time will tell, but the same government that ruined hydro a long time ago has got its hands into another form of energy. Let's see.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We'll now return to the member for Scarborough–Rouge Park to comment on what he has heard.

Mr. Vijay Thanigasalam: I appreciate the opportunity to finish speaking about the proposed Bill 32, the Access to Natural Gas Act. Also, I would like to acknowledge the comments from the members from Kitchener South–Hespeler, Nickel Belt, Kitchener–Conestoga and Humber River–Black Creek.

Everyday Ontario families want to see this proposed legislation passed. They want the savings we had promised during the election campaign and the savings we have been delivering to them since. Promise made, promise kept. Businesses want this proposed legislation passed. It's going to save money for them. It will also allow them to have some new and innovative approaches, as I mentioned last week, to keeping them competitive. Our government is focused on making Ontario open for business, and we have been doing just that.

Both Ontario families and businesses are in favour of this. This is win-win proposed legislation. If this proposed

bill, Bill 32, passes, this will clearly benefit so many at such a small cost to the ratepayers that it's a common sense choice to support those Ontarians in rural and remote areas of this province. In favour of helping those in more rural and remote areas of Ontario to ensure that they have access to natural gas, to ensure they are able to switch from inefficient means of heating their homes, such as gas, propane and electricity, to more environmentally and more cost-friendly methods, which is natural gas, I urge them all to vote in favour of Ontario families and businesses.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Members, we have a former member visiting us this afternoon. In the members' east gallery, we have David Turnbull, who represented York Mills in the 35th and 36th Parliaments and Don Valley West in the 37th Parliament. Welcome back to Queen's Park, David.

Further debate?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'm here to speak about Bill 32, the bill to increase access to natural gas in communities. Essentially, this bill 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.

It is clear that no one should have to choose between paying the heating bill and eating.

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The cost of energy in the north is no doubt astronomical.

Our members have received many letters with stories like this one. This is from a lady who lives on a rural property in Stevensville, Ontario. She currently heats her home with propane, and in the winter months this costs the family approximately \$1,200 to \$1,300 every six months. This family is very low-income, and these costs represent an immense burden on their family. Over the Christmas holiday, they actually ran out of propane and were unable to afford a new tank, and they spent four days in one of the coldest weeks of the year without heating. That's a horrible situation.

There is no doubt that energy should be made more affordable. But what we're really worried about with this government and this bill is that this bill is not going to solve the issue of energy affordability. The NDP has raised many amendments to this bill to address some of the flaws that we see with Bill 32, and they were rejected. I'd like to address some of these concerns today.

(1) The first concern we have with this bill is that the words "rural, northern and on-reserve consumers" do not appear in the bill at all. This government has talked on and on about how the whole purpose of this bill is to make energy cheaper in the north and in rural communities but there is no mention of any requirement that this bill will benefit these communities. Why is that? The omission of that raises concerns that the goal of this expansion program is not to strengthen the rural and northern economy, but rather to subsidize suburban sprawl for the benefit of developers with discounted natural gas installations that are funded by existing consumers. We get that suspicion because this government introduced this bill

with the Ontario Home Builders' Association. An implication of this is that existing customers of natural gas would see higher gas prices because they would be subsidizing natural gas installations for big developers to build new home developments. It makes me suspicious. I think that's a big concern, and I'm not the only one who has big concerns.

I want to quote Tom Adams, a recognized expert consultant who spoke at the Standing Committee on General Government about Bill 32. He specializes in audits. "Bill 32 would create a blank cheque for the government of the day to impose hidden taxes of unlimited size on existing natural gas customers to fund benefits for a chosen few." That's very concerning. "Customers who pay these hidden charges will receive zero benefit of any kind from the higher costs they incur—all pain, no gain, except for those who get the subsidies."

I can imagine that there are a lot of people in this province who are paying their natural gas bill now who may not be very 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.

"New powers in the bill would give the minister unlimited opportunities to hide the costs in the darkest corners of utility accounts." That sounds very scary. It also sounds like a tax.

"Nothing in Bill 32 would provide the slightest opportunity for due process for disadvantaged consumers." This is another quote from the expert consultant who specializes in energy audits.

These are important issues about transparency and who benefits that I believe should be addressed.

(2) This bill does not require any consideration of the impact of expansion decisions on greenhouse gas emissions, nor is there any evidence that this government has posted this bill on the Environmental Registry, as required by law under section 15 of the Environmental Bill of Rights. As I've said before and as all of us know, climate change is a very pressing concern for Ontario and the world. We're already seeing the devastating and escalating impacts of climate change in Ontario with the sharp rise of forest fires in the north, the extreme flooding and heat wave events in southern Ontario, and the devastating cyclones that swept through Ottawa. These extreme events are the new normal. These extreme 100-year occurrences or 100-year floods are now every other year, and we will be, from now on, forever recovering from a natural disaster of some sort. And it will get worse unless we take meaningful and measurable action to measure our greenhouse gas emissions and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions so we can meet the target that world scientists are telling us we have to meet, and that's a 1.5 degree maximum increase in warming.

This bill needs to do its part by accounting and measuring for greenhouse gas emissions. It doesn't, and it should.

(3) Another matter that we're very concerned about is that this bill mandates partisan advertising on gas bills.

Now, this is very interesting because it's this government who criticized the Liberal government time and time again for putting campaign slogans on energy bills. The Liberal government was notorious for using government messaging and propaganda on these bills, and now you're doing exactly the same thing. I fear what these slogans will be. I'd like to quote Peter Tabuns, who has a gift for words, where he says, "Will it be Doug Ford ... holding a big 'open for business' sign" on our gas bills, or "Your supper was cooked because I had a hand in it." Maybe that could be on our gas bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): If I could interrupt for a moment, even though you're quoting another member, when he said "Doug Ford" as opposed to "Premier Ford" or "the Premier," then he was out of order when he did that. I won't ask you to necessarily withdraw this time, but in the future, if you're going to do that, you will be asked. Thank you.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you very much, Speaker. I actually do recall that you were the Speaker at that time, so thank you for drawing attention to it.

What certainly won't look good is having the PC slogan next to a bill that goes up and up and up each month because of these secret rate hikes.

(4) We asked for an amendment to clarify that the OEB continues to have the authority to review and approve natural gas expansion proposals in the consumers' interest, and that was rejected. It's important that we have this kind of OEB oversight over our electricity grid so that we can ensure there is a regulator out there that is making sure that these expansion projects will benefit people and Ontario because the OEB is an independent regulator.

The OEB reviews programs for compensation, service quality and reliability. You and I all agree that our energy sector needs real, sensible, independent oversight. I ask you, Speaker: Will the OEB be able to scrutinize these projects to ensure they're going to be best for consumers in Ontario? Will there be a ceiling so that the costs to current consumers can only go up so much with new natural gas expansion? Who will these ratepayers be who have to bear the brunt of the increased costs?

These are real and important questions.

To again quote energy auditor Toms Adams, "Private gas distribution investment supervised by an independent, professional public utility regulation has been a winner for Ontario." So why wouldn't we keep it?

Gas has been almost an apolitical topic in this province for 100 years, and I fear that this lack of OEB oversight will mean that Ontario will be building new gas expansion that doesn't truly benefit Ontarians and the province. I don't believe that's the way to go, because skyrocketing hydro rates over the last 15 years show what can happen when energy infrastructure decisions are made by ministerial directive without the cost-benefit or risk analysis and without regard for consumer interests.

It is not a good sign that you opposed our amendment to require the OEB to approve natural gas expansion projects for the benefit of the consumer. You rejected independent oversight, and by rejecting this independent

oversight, this bill, Bill 32, could open up the door for private companies and private monopolies and give them the opportunity to lay pipe wherever they want, to whoever they decide, without these decisions being overseen and overruled potentially by the OEB. And that's a problem.

It also opens the door to all kinds of political decision-making on expansion of the system rather than having the assessment done by an independent regulator. I'd say this is a politicization of natural gas distribution, and that is not good. I think we can do better than that.

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There is also another reason why it could be beneficial to have OEB oversight, and that is to consider the long-term ramifications of giving company subsidies to connect consumers to natural gas. The reason I say this is because natural gas mightn't always be the cheap fuel that it is now.

I say this because in North America and the United States, there is a natural gas bubble, driven by fracking developments down south. The gas industry is desperately looking for new customers to suck up their extra product, because they don't like the low prices. They aren't charities; they want to make money, and they're looking at connecting new customers. But their long-term goal is to make a profit and have higher prices. The concern here is that rural Ontario might be spending a lot of money now to get connected to gas that, in the long term, as prices rise, mightn't be such a good investment for them and their household budgeting.

Having proper regulation of the sector with the OEB would ensure proper regulation and would allow the independent regulator to think through these short-term and these long-term ramifications of our energy system. Now it doesn't seem like we have that regulation anymore.

(5) We had an amendment that assures consumers that, once the subsidy is approved for a natural gas expansion project, it won't later be increased by a cost overrun. Right now, it seems like cost overruns are covered. So that would be like me buying a sweater at the store and then, after I'd bought it, gone home and worn it for a few weeks, I'd go back, check out my credit card bill and find out that I had an extra \$50 that the company had charged me for that bill.

It seems reasonable to me that there should be no requirement that a company, if it's doing a natural gas expansion project, is allowed to pass on the cost overruns, again and again and again, to the consumer. There should be limits set to that.

We had an amendment on that, and it was rejected. You voted that amendment down. I don't think that's right, and I don't think ratepayers are going to think that's right either.

(6) We introduced an amendment that ensures that there's an upper limit to the maximum total cost of each gas expansion project, and that upper limit needs to be known before compensation is approved so that everyone knows, including the ratepayers, including the public, what we're getting into.

I don't believe that we can just write a blank cheque for some of these expansion projects. I don't believe that's right. I believe ratepayers deserve to know. I do believe that some of you must agree with that, but you didn't. You rejected it.

(7) Here's another amendment we had with the goal to provide additional transparency to Bill 32. We introduced an amendment that would require potential projects to be published on a website, with information about the total amount of the cost and the description demonstrating the direct or indirect benefits of each expansion project.

That seems very reasonable. That's about transparency. I know that the Conservatives—you—care about transparency, because it's a sign of good government.

I also believe that consumers care about transparency, because consumers have a right to know, when their bill comes in higher month to month, why their bill is going up, and where their hard-earned money is going to and what natural gas expansion project it's going to.

The public should be in a position to understand what is being done and what is being stuck on that bill, because that's about transparency. Transparency also ensures that there's some honesty with natural gas expansion.

But you rejected it, and I think that's something that should be changed.

(8) We introduced an amendment that no compensation is payable by consumers or classes of consumers if the consumers do not benefit directly or indirectly. That is key, because one of the fundamental principles of the OEB is that any project must benefit everyone. That principle must be kept. It was rejected.

Speaker, I have a lot of concerns about Bill 32. I do believe that energy should be affordable for everyone; it should be. But this bill has so many flaws. There's so much secrecy here. There's no transparency. There's no real oversight from the OEB, an independent regulator, to ensure that new projects benefit consumers. There's no guarantee that consumers will benefit. There's no guarantee that northern, rural or on-reserve communities will benefit. There's this genuine concern that this will benefit big developers building subdivisions in the suburbs. There's a real concern that this will lead to the serious politicization of natural gas decisions.

These are big concerns, Speaker, and they should be big concerns to this government.

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

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: I think it's a real pleasure to be able to stand today on behalf of the fine constituents of Niagara West and to add my voice in response to the contributions that the member opposite made with regard to natural gas, particularly in rural and remote parts of Ontario. I understand, of course, the member's own lived experience here within the city of Toronto and some of the perspective that she provides from that particular point of view.

I also think it's really important that we take a broader step back, because I know that the NDP don't always understand rural Ontario. They don't understand the plight

of farmers, of struggling communities that for 15 years were neglected and abandoned by a government that had little to no respect for those poorer communities and the individuals who lived within them.

But I'm very excited that our government on this side of the aisle has, frankly, a level of respect and appreciation for the struggles that families are facing in rural and remote communities in Ontario. As a member of the Legislature, representing a riding that, although not truly rural—more of a semi-rural/small urban split—there are a large amount of people within my community who are looking forward to the implementation of this act and who frankly have expressed a great deal of support for it.

I think back to earlier this week—or, I should say, late last week—when I had the opportunity to meet with the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance. This was a major suggestion that they had made, before the election as well, to expand natural gas access across rural and remote communities in Ontario. They had nothing but praise for our government's action in this regard and the fact that this will actually open up a great deal of economic opportunity for themselves and for other job creators across the province, as well as, then, the employees that they hire.

I'm very disappointed to hear the member take umbrage with particular aspects of this legislation. I think it's a fine piece of legislation. Frankly, I look forward to seeing it pass and become law.

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

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to thank the member from University-Rosedale for a great presentation. It was certainly fact-filled.

I have had a lot of concerns about many aspects of this bill, but a couple stand out for me. "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." I'm not quite sure who these people will be. Are they going to be hand-picked for rebates, or is everyone across the board going to get it? It's not very clear about that.

It says that the LG, with support from cabinet, may prescribe consumers or classes of consumers who will be entitled to relief for expansion costs. Well, with any business that I've ever seen over the years, any expansion costs are always—always—passed on to the consumer. The companies find ways, working in conjunction with the government, to pass it on to the consumer. So when I hear people from the government side saying, "Oh, your bills might go up a dollar or two a month," that's totally bogus.

I think the bills will expand. As you try to expand to the north, you're going to have to put in hundreds—thousands—of kilometres of pipe. I think the companies, Union Gas or all the other companies that are involved, are going to have to pass that—because you know that any construction costs always go up. What costs \$1 million today to build, in five years is usually \$4 million or \$5 million.

So I think the projections aren't here, I don't think the actual costs of building these infrastructure improvements

are here, and I think we're going to be seeing a lot of backpedalling by the government in the next few years about the real, true costs of this project.

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

Mr. Parm Gill: First and foremost, let me just thank the minister for bringing forward this wonderful piece of legislation, Bill 32. This is going to have a huge impact on our province's economy, Mr. Speaker. I think that some of the sectors that were partially ignored by the previous Liberal government stand to benefit from this piece of legislation big-time.

One that also impacts my riding of Milton, Mr. Speaker, is the agriculture industry; a lot of farmers. I think that, for the most part, they sometimes don't get enough credit for what they do, and the kind of impact the farmers and the agriculture industry in general have on our province's economy. Mr. Speaker, you'd be surprised to know that this sector alone contributes roughly \$106 billion towards our province's GDP. Almost 50,000 farmers support 1.2 million jobs. That's one in eight workers in Ontario.

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As I was going around during the election, and obviously since, every time I have an opportunity—I've got a significant rural component to my great riding of Milton. A lot of these farmers, individuals who live in rural parts of my riding, have a hard time making ends meet. The energy cost being what it was under the Liberals—we're doing everything we can to bring that down. We'll save families anywhere from roughly \$800 to \$2,500 per year if they have the ability to switch to natural gas from other sources of energy such as propane, oil, electric heating and so forth.

I would encourage all members to support this wonderful piece of legislation.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: I want to thank the member from University–Rosedale for her comments. What particularly spoke out to me were the concerns around the impact that this bill could have on the environment.

A recent study has come out that has shown that, right now, there are five countries in this world that hold 70% of the world's wilderness. Number two on that list is Canada. We have a huge responsibility not just to our own citizens and the citizens of Canada in regard to the environment; we have a huge concern and we have a huge focus and responsibility to the world.

When I look at this piece of legislation and the potential impacts it could have upon the environment in regard to greenhouse gas emissions, it's very, very concerning.

If we look at Ontario, we see that we had over 1,000 forest fires this year in Ontario. It was an 87% increase from last year. This is really, really drastic. If we take this and expand it to look at throughout Canada, we saw that BC forest fires were so bad that Vancouver had consistent smog and smoke alerts. Vancouver was covered in a haze of smoke because of this issue.

The environment is not something just for the future. Often, discussions around protecting the environment

have to do with being for our future generations and for our future children. This is an issue today. This is an issue that we're seeing live, in front of us, with these increases in fires in the north here in Ontario and with the increases of fires in Vancouver, BC, and in California.

The environment is something which is so, so crucial to how we live today. We have a responsibility to this world to ensure we're protecting it. Any concerns around greenhouse emissions and the impact on the environment must be held at the forefront.

I appreciate the member bringing those concerns forward, because we only have one world, Mr. Speaker, and it's something that we must work to protect collectively.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We'll return to the member from University–Rosedale to wrap it up.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you so much for your comments.

To the member for Niagara West, I do take issue with the assumption that the NDP doesn't care about rural voters. We have members who represent all areas of the province: rural, northern and urban. We work very hard to make sure that we properly represent the millions of people who live in NDP ridings.

The NDP, in our platform, has said that we are in support of funding to increase natural gas expansion to northern and rural communities. That's not what is up for debate. What is up for debate is the lack of independent oversight over what projects get approved, because we don't want a situation where we are subsidizing big developers to build natural gas expansion projects for subdivisions, and rural and northern and on-reserve communities are completely left out. As the bill is written, that is a very real possibility.

We are also concerned about the lack of transparency and, quite frankly, the secrecy around what this bill means for consumers. How much are these projects going to cost? Do these projects actually benefit Ontarians? How is this going to affect everyday people's bills? When they open their gas bill and they take a look, they should know why their gas bill is going up or down, and this bill doesn't provide the kind of transparency that they deserve.

Because everyone here knows that energy should be affordable, and one way to make it affordable is to make sure that we have transparency, so that we're doing the right regulation of our energy grid and we're expanding our energy grid in the right way.

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

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It's an honour to participate in the debate on Bill 32, the Access to Natural Gas Act. I want to be clear, Mr. Speaker, that access to affordable energy is essential for people who live in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. We must provide help for people to make the transition from heating with oil, propane and electric heating. Farmers need support for reducing their energy costs, especially for things like drying corn and greenhouse vegetable production.

But we can also help farmers become energy producers by supporting the production of renewable natural gas.

Expanding rural pipeline infrastructure can be used to ramp up demand, production and delivery of renewable natural gas from Ontario farms, waste facilities, wastewater biosolids and landfill gas. But it's not clear that Bill 32 is going to accomplish this.

Energy consultant Tom Adams, who is generally considered a conservative, free-market thinker, came to committee and said, "Bill 32 would create a blank cheque for the government of the day to impose hidden taxes of unlimited size on existing natural gas customers to fund benefits for a chosen few." This is exactly what the previous Liberal government did with the Green Energy Act, and we don't want to repeat the same mistakes with natural gas.

That's exactly why the member from Oshawa put forward, I think, a few reasonable amendments at committee, and they were all voted down, unfortunately. I want to raise a few of the concerns that were brought forward.

First of all, be clear that this is infrastructure for rural, remote and Indigenous communities. We don't want consumers to be blindsided in thinking, "Hey, we're supporting rural Ontario," when we're really supporting the development of infrastructure for suburban subdivisions, for example.

Also, there were amendments put forward to provide more transparent OEB oversight and protections for consumers of natural gas. Under Bill 32, existing customers of natural gas will be required to subsidize the expansion of natural gas infrastructure. That might be very appropriate public policy, but I think it would make sense to make sure that we protect those consumers and provide limits on what they will be charged, and proper oversight.

Finally, there was an amendment to limit partisan advertising on bills. That, again, is something the previous government did, and I was hoping that this government would end those kinds of practices.

I'm really asking the government to take the time to work with the opposition and stakeholders to fix Bill 32, to address these concerns and to actually deliver affordable energy for rural customers.

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

Mr. Sheref Sabawy: I'm rising today to support the bill. The whole speech from my colleague from University-Rosedale was about the private sector being there to make money. That's actually why they are there. They are there to make money. They are not a public service. They are a private service. They are there to make money. I don't think there's anything wrong with that.

If the government is open for business and asking business to contribute, we should expect to give them the opportunity to thrive and make money, so that they can invest more money in expanding to areas that would not be connected to the gas pipelines without that.

By opening the market for the private companies, we are putting investment from outside of our resources, which those users—if the private sector was not available to give them that access, they would not have access to natural gas to start with.

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So we are disconnecting benefits from the rural areas and northern Ontario to save money—I think it's about \$800 per family or \$2,500 per business in costs. As well, it's conserving and much more environmentally friendly than using oil or wood to heat their houses. Not only that, it's going to help them to build small manufacturing and small processing because they have energy which can drive those types of small businesses.

I am supporting this bill, and I hope we vote for it.

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

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's my pleasure to have some questions and comments on this debate, because it's really a very important step we're taking when we're talking about heating and natural gas. I know that when it comes to heating, electricity is extremely expensive, so when we have this Bill 32 going forward, we are trying to understand why this government wouldn't have some transparency around where the natural gas services are going to be. Nobody knows. It's just left open to the developers to decide that.

We know that rural and northern Ontario residential homes have been suffering with electric prices that are skyrocketing, so it would be really helpful and reassuring to people who live in northern and rural Ontario—according to the members, who they profess to represent, but they're not representing them in a way that they can actually count on Bill 32 to deliver that natural gas service. They are leaving it open to developers to decide where it's going to be.

I can tell you, there are good developers and there are developers who just worry about profit only, and that's where they're going to put those pipelines. They are going to go to cities and areas of the province where they're going to see profits, and that profit that they're going to make is then going to turn back onto the ratepayers. The cost of that pipeline to go into an up-and-coming subdivision, which is going to yield much profit for the gas company, is going to end up back on the bills of the users—users in rural and northern Ontario, who aren't maybe going to get those natural gas services. So that is our concern.

When this government professes to be so transparent and accountable, quite frankly, the legislation that they have presented in this House is completely the opposite of that. It contradicts the transparency and accountability mantra that they have. We want to see some accountability and transparency. I know our member from Oshawa, when she was on the committee, asked for those things, and they declined. That paints a real picture about this government.

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

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I've been listening intently to everyone's comments here today and I think, for my part, with respect to what rural people or northern people might think about this issue, I just want to read a press release that the Ontario Federation of Agriculture released on

September 18. This was written by Keith Currie, who is the current president of the OFA. The title says, “OFA Welcomes Ontario Government’s Plans to Expand Natural Gas.”

“Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced promising news for Ontario farmers, businesses and rural communities today with proposed new legislation that would expand access to natural gas in rural and northern Ontario. ‘We have been pushing for the need for more widespread, affordable natural gas energy across rural Ontario, so this is encouraging news for the agricultural community,’ says Keith Currie, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA).”

The Premier “used opening day of the International Plowing Match and Rural Expo to announce the government’s plans to introduce a new Access to Natural Gas Act that would encourage partnerships between private gas distributors and communities to develop projects that expand access to natural gas. If the new legislation is passed, the Ontario government says it will work with the Ontario Energy Board to develop regulations to enable the program this fall.

“Energy is one of the largest inputs on farms, and we need access to natural gas to help boost the competitiveness of rural Ontario communities, businesses and farms,” says Currie. “And natural gas is the single most important investment that will deliver a competitive edge to continue to drive growth in rural Ontario.”

“OFA has been advocating for improved infrastructure—including access to natural gas—for many years and looks forward to working with the Ontario government to implement a new natural gas program when the new legislation is in place.”

This is what rural Ontario thinks about our bill. I’m proud to support it as well.

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

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Guelph for your comments on Bill 32. Like you, when I was going through and reviewing what the auditor, Tom Adams, was saying about this bill, I also expressed concern because it did seem like this was not the kind of bill that would create the transparent, accountable, independent and very well-regulated energy sector that we need to make electricity more affordable.

In my riding, we have a very high percentage of seniors who live on very limited fixed incomes. When I go door to door I will often talk to seniors who talk about the high cost of their energy bills. They’re doing everything they can to keep their costs down so that they can continue to live in their homes. They don’t want to leave their community. If their gas bills keep going up and up, they might have to make some tough choices that quite frankly they don’t need to make.

As the member for Guelph mentioned, I do have some serious concerns about the lack of transparency with this bill. I think it’s very reasonable to expect that consumers have a right to know what is contributing to the cost of their energy bills, especially if it’s not because of the energy that they’re creating to heat their own homes but

it’s because some developer wants to build a natural gas expansion project 100 miles or 200 miles away from their home. They’ve got a right to know that.

I’m also deeply concerned about the potential politicization of the energy grid, particularly with the natural gas sector, by taking away the strict oversight of the OEB and allowing more ministerial input into who gets what projects and when. I think that’s going to hurt consumers and this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): We’ll return to the member from Guelph for his two-minute response.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the responses from all the members.

I’d like to begin by addressing the response from the member from University–Rosedale because in committee those of us on the opposition side raised the concerns about the lack of transparency, accountability and oversight in Bill 32 because it’s very vague. The members opposite said, “Trust us. Trust us when it goes to regulation. Trust us.” My response was that that’s exactly what the previous government said on the electricity file: “Trust us. Trust us to do the right thing.” We all know what we’ve paid for in that, which gets to the point of the member from Mississauga–Erin Mills, who talked about affordability.

We need affordable energy, particularly in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. So I’m going to ask the government to ask themselves some questions: Is the purpose of this bill to deliver affordable energy? Or is it the purpose of this bill to deliver natural gas? The two may not necessarily be the same thing. For example, greenhouse growers have said, “Why not allow us to not only use natural gas but do cogeneration so we utilize energy more efficiently?” That’s not mentioned in this bill.

I’ve had rural and remote people come to me and say that in some rural and remote communities it makes more financial sense to use geothermal energy rather than natural gas. That’s not talked about in this bill. I’ve had others come to me, particularly farmers, and say, “We want to produce renewable natural gas that we can ship in these lines.” That’s not mentioned in this bill.

I agree with the member from Carleton who talked about the need to support farmers, but it’s not clear whether this bill will actually deliver on that. We don’t want the government to promise one thing and deliver something else.

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

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Speaker, before I start my prepared notes, I’m going to be repeating a number of different things that have been said in this House and so maybe the opposition will listen to them this time. My prose will not be as eloquent as yours was, sir, when you gave your statement out here. Well done, sir.

Thank you for the opportunity to stand here in the Legislature this afternoon to talk about Bill 32, the Access to Natural Gas Act.

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I would also like to thank my colleague from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, the Minister of Infrastructure. His team

developed a great bill for rural and northern Ontario, and they continue to be strong advocates for our rural communities while making life more affordable for families and small businesses.

It has been said before, and it bears repeating, that the previous Liberal government saddled the people of Ontario with a \$15-billion deficit. The province experienced 15 years of waste and mismanagement. They mortgaged our future and our children's future, the effects of which are far-reaching.

Over the past 15 years, Ontarians watched as their energy rates doubled and tripled. This hurt our families deeply. In fact, as we have heard on far too many occasions, it forced families to choose between keeping the lights on and putting food on the table. It also drove manufacturing jobs out of Ontario and into neighbouring jurisdictions.

However, since day one, our government has remained committed to restoring Ontario's historic role as the economic engine of Canada. I am happy to say that Ontario's government for the people continues to work hard towards this goal.

We have taken swift and decisive action to help alleviate the financial strain from Ontarians. Our government axed cap-and-trade, bringing an end to Ontario's carbon tax era. We are saving the average family \$260 a year, including \$80 a year from natural gas bills, putting more money back into Ontarians' pockets and back into their communities.

Gone too is the Green Energy Act and with it 758 expensive and wasteful energy projects—projects forced on communities that simply did not want them.

We've also lowered gas prices, bringing relief to the pumps. Travelling around my riding this weekend, I saw many gas stations with prices below a dollar a litre.

Ontarians have spoken, and we are listening. I'm proud to say that we are moving our province in the right direction.

The expansion of natural gas in rural and northern Ontario is the next step in this process. This year, our government announced Bill 32, the Access to Natural Gas Act, 2018. The purpose of this act is simple: expanding natural gas access to families and businesses in rural and northern Ontario. How are we achieving this? By working with and not against local communities and the private sector.

Under the previous government, private sector companies faced numerous restrictions which discouraged their participation in natural gas expansion. Instead of their participation, a taxpayer-funded program managed portions of the expansion process.

Our government is committed to changing this approach. Bill 32, if passed, will introduce a program that would encourage more private gas distributors to partner with communities across Ontario to develop projects that can expand access to affordable and efficient natural gas.

Under this program, private sector participation is welcomed, not discouraged. By taking a market-based approach and allowing private capital to build new natural gas networks, Ontarians would see their gas bills fall. In

addition, more communities would gain access to natural gas.

Quite simply, this is a win-win situation. The program would deliver decades of benefits to communities across Ontario at no additional cost to the taxpayers, while also ensuring affordable natural gas to consumers.

Mr. Speaker, natural gas is an affordable, reliable and clean heating option for families and businesses. Approximately 350 million residential customers and 130,000 businesses across the province rely on natural gas. Space heating, domestic hot water, steam and process heat are just some of the many ways natural gas is used by homeowners and businesses.

Having access to natural gas allows businesses to compete, grow and create jobs.

It is also a cost-effective energy source. Switching to natural gas from oil, propane or electric heat can save an average residential customer between \$800 and \$2,500 per year. However, in too many parts of rural and northern Ontario, families and businesses do not have that option. There exists a massive disparity in natural gas availability in Ontario—a disparity that further highlights Ontario's rural-versus-urban divide. While 90% of urban homes have access to natural gas, less than 20% of Ontario's rural households and farmers have access.

There is a lot of work to be done to fix this imbalance. The previous government mishandled this file on multiple occasions. In 2016, behind closed doors, the previous Liberal government planned to impose strict new barriers on natural gas. Their backroom plan showed that they were preparing to effectively ban it from all homes and small buildings built in 2030 and later. This decision was made despite the fact that it would triple heating costs for the average consumer. In addition, the cost to convert a single home from natural gas to electricity would have cost the average household \$4,500. Fortunately, this was stopped. The people of Ontario spoke up, strongly voiced their opposition, and thankfully, this reckless plan was put back on the shelf.

When the government finally did come around to investing in natural gas, their investment was significantly lower than originally promised. In April 2015, they promised \$200 million in loans and \$30 million in grants for natural gas expansion, welcome news to many rural and northern communities. Unfortunately, in the years that followed that announcement, rural and northern Ontarians were ignored, first in 2016, in the aforementioned backroom plan to phase out natural gas, and finally, in 2017, when the government announced an investment of only \$100 million to build natural gas lines. Somewhere in the backroom decision-making, \$130 million was cut from the future of natural gas in rural and northern Ontario.

At worst, the previous government's approach to handling natural gas expansion involved secret phase-out plans and cuts to expansion funding. At best, their approach involved lengthy delays or promises that never materialized.

I speak to this having experienced the delays and their effects in Milverton, in my riding of Perth-Wellington.

Milverton is not unlike many small towns and communities scattered across rural and northern Ontario. Located in the township of Perth East, it is a town of 1,500 people and is situated in the heart of my riding. It is an agriculture community that is home to Boshart Industries, a maker of water well, plumbing and other industrial parts and employer of 119 people.

The township of Perth East and Union Gas partnered to extend natural gas to Milverton. This was a major project that would not only benefit the homeowners in the town, but nearby farms and businesses as well. Both the township and Union Gas sought approval for a four-inch natural gas pipeline, this pipeline being 20 kilometres in length and running into the community of Milverton. In total, the estimated cost was \$4.9 million. Unfortunately, however, the Ontario Energy Board delayed Union Gas's submission. This decision was made despite the fact that a delay on the extension would mean Milverton residents and businesses would lose \$1.3 million per year in energy savings.

I remember speaking with representatives of both the township and Union Gas working to resolve the delay, hearing the frustration in their voices as they faced roadblock after roadblock. The township was competing with other municipalities for investment dollars and looking to both attract and retain residents, as well as encourage businesses to locate in their community. Due to the delays, Union Gas was forced to consider the long-term viability of this project while waiting to hear answers about the project going forward.

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Ultimately, this story does have a happy ending. After many delays and much advocacy, natural gas was extended to Milverton. However, it does highlight the frustrations that many communities have with the current system. This is why our government is committed to collaborating with the private sector to get natural gas to consumers in the most expedient way possible.

The demand is there from consumers in rural and northern Ontario, and natural gas expansion is especially welcome to our province's agricultural producers, including those in my riding of Perth-Wellington. The sustainability of the agri-food sector is of critical importance to the province's future. Ontario's agri-food sector is one of the world's most diverse, with almost 50,000 farms in numerous communities across our province. Our agri-food sector contributes \$106 billion to Ontario's GDP and supports 1.2 million jobs. That's one in eight Ontario workers. In my riding of Perth county, agriculture represents in excess of \$837 million in farm cash receipts. It is our lifeblood.

I also have the privilege of serving as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. As parliamentary assistant, I have the opportunity to travel across the province and speak with members of Ontario's agriculture community. I hear their concerns about the future. More and more farmers are feeling the economic strain. They are seeing their expenses skyrocket while their revenues decline.

Having grown up on a farm myself, I understand these challenges. If there's one certainty in farming, it is that

nothing is certain. You need to plan ahead. You need to ensure that you have a solid infrastructure. Utilizing natural gas is a key component of that.

Natural gas expansion and this bill have certainly been a priority for those in the agri-food community. In October of this year, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture clearly stated their support for this bill. The OFA is the largest general farm organization in Ontario. They represent 38,000 farm families, serve as the voice of our province's farmers and have long been advocating for natural gas expansion.

Energy is one of the largest expenses in farming. Keith Currie, the president of the OFA, put it best when he said, "Natural gas is the single most important investment that will deliver a competitive edge to continue to drive growth in rural Ontario."

In fact, the OFA stated, that if "natural gas were available across" Ontario, "it would free up well over \$1 billion in annual energy spending," thus increasing business opportunities. "That is \$1 billion in disposable income" to help stimulate our rural communities. The small businesses that hire students and serve as the backbone of many towns would benefit.

The OFA said it best when they said that investing in rural Ontario is not just good for rural Ontario. An investment that improves both rural Ontario's physical and social infrastructure means that towns and villages remain places where jobs are created and places that people can continue to live and settle in.

Of course, this helps alleviate the stress on Ontario's urban centres as well. A stronger and more economically vibrant rural Ontario benefits all Ontarians. Our rural communities have a lot to offer too, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to visit our rural communities and see the innovation that's occurring there in the agri-food industry. Representing a rural riding, I have seen this innovation at work, and I know that natural gas expansion would help our rural communities achieve their full potential.

Natural gas expansion is not only being welcomed in the agri-food industry; it is also being welcomed in the business community. It is no secret to anyone here in the House today that the previous government was no friend to the manufacturing sector. According to the Fraser Institute, between 2005 and 2015 alone, Ontario's manufacturing output fell by 18%, and manufacturing employment fell by 28%. What's more startling is that the Fraser Institute calculated that Ontario's high electricity prices were responsible for approximately 64% of the losses. That's nearly two thirds. In total, this is a jaw-dropping 75,000 manufacturing jobs lost due to high electricity costs.

In Perth-Wellington, our nearest rival jurisdictions are Michigan and New York. While the share of GDP in Ontario's manufacturing sector declined by 5.1% from 2005 to 2016, it increased in Michigan by 1%. While these numbers may not seem like a lot, to business owners and investors, they are incredibly important in tipping the scales in favour of one jurisdiction over another. The high

cost of electricity has been holding Ontario back, but through natural gas expansion, Ontario will truly be open for business.

Speaker, numerous business leaders have come forward in support of our bill. With my remaining time, I will share some examples with the House.

Representing 60,000 members in 135 local chambers of commerce and boards of trade, Ontario Chamber of Commerce president and CEO, Rocco Rossi, said, “The proposed natural gas expansion will not only help to make life more affordable for Ontarians but boost job creation and economic growth in rural and northern ... communities.

“We have been consistently urging the Ontario government to expand natural gas access...”

As well, the Ontario Home Builders’ Association, the OHBA, represents 4,000 member companies comprised of 29 local associations across Ontario. Regarding Bill 32, OHBA CEO Joe Vaccaro said, “The decision ... will support future housing supply and choice in rural and northern communities while providing homeowners and businesses with an affordable and reliable heating option that will keep their everyday costs down.”

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Bill 32, the Access to Natural Gas Act, is an investment in Ontario’s future. By expanding natural gas access, we are giving our northern and rural communities the opportunity to compete both locally and globally. We are sending a signal not just to Ontarians, but to all who are looking to move and invest in Ontario, that our whole province is indeed open for business.

In today’s economy, every dollar matters. We know that when families save on their energy bill, that money goes back to our local economies. When businesses are able to spend less on energy costs, they are able to hire new individuals or reinvest the money back into their businesses. When companies looking to invest see more affordable energy solutions, they are more likely to choose Ontario over rival jurisdictions.

This bill represents the opportunity to assist Ontario’s families and businesses, while also increasing economic opportunity in the province. I would encourage all my colleagues in the House to invest in the future of Ontario and support Bill 32.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: It’s interesting to hear the member opposite talk about the Liberals with regard to hydro. This mess started with them. It’s interesting to hear the member opposite talk about Liberal backroom plans; I’m pretty sure that’s how all government plans are cooked up. It’s actually interesting to see something noble—the idea of expanding into rural communities and providing them natural gas—get twisted into something that will help create suburban sprawl on farmland. In fact, it was mentioned there. It was about future housing.

And so I sit here and I reflect on the campaign and how the Premier at the time talked about building on the green-belt. Well, here we go. That was immediately withdrawn. It was removed: “Do you know what? Oops. That was a

mistake.” Then they were able to think, “Well, how do we enact this? Hmm. Let’s take rural gas expansion. Let’s figure it out. How do we make that happen?”

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What we’re going to see here is them relinquishing control and allowing the gas companies to do, I guess, speculative piping, where they can find the best way to get new subdivisions on farmland. I think we’re going to see, looking back on this, that the places that were intended to see the benefit have virtually none. I don’t know how long they’re going to be waiting in their cold homes in the winter for natural gas expansion while we see brand new development all over the place on farmland elsewhere. It’s a little disturbing.

It’s funny. Sometimes I sit here and I hear so much spin about what they’re doing, it’s like I’m watching a laundry machine. And look, why allow for partisan advertising on gas bills? What’s the purpose of this? I guess you’re campaigning three and a half years out, except none of those rural communities will see any gas expansion, probably, by that time anyway. Time will tell.

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

Mr. Norman Miller: I’m pleased to have the opportunity to make some comments about Bill 32, An Act to amend the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, and on the speech from my good friend the member from Perth–Wellington, who made some really good points in his 20-minute talk about this bill. I know he’s a huge supporter of agriculture and the agri-food industry. He’s a huge supporter of rural Ontario, so he would like to see, as this bill will allow for, more expansion of natural gas to support farms and to support rural communities.

In my riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka I had a meeting recently with McDougall township just north of Parry Sound. They had a list of three or four different items they wanted to talk about, but one of the asks on their list was, “Can we get natural gas expansion into the Nobel area, where there’s a subdivision that doesn’t have natural gas at this point?” They recognize how important it is for the people in that area to gain access to natural gas, that it can be a big difference in the cost of heating, particularly if you’re heating with baseboard electric, which a lot of people are in my area, or other forms of heating. It can be a difference of \$800 to \$2,500 per year for a family. That’s why this bill is important.

I would say, in the closing seconds I have, let’s not forget about propane as well. I know there’s a lot of independent businesses that use propane. I heat my home with propane because there’s never any opportunity—I know natural gas is never coming to where I’m located. But I also say that propane has a big role to play in terms of transportation and reducing greenhouse gases for rural and northern Ontario by equipping more pickup trucks with propane conversions, and school buses etc. It does make a difference for cost and for the environment if we use more propane in transportation.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: This is a very weird debate. I think that if an alien were to suddenly appear in the gallery, this alien would be extremely confused as to what's going on here. It strikes me that absolutely nobody in this House is arguing against the intention of the bill. The intention of the bill is motherhood and apple pie. Everybody wants the expansion of natural gas. However, the debate here is over the specifics of the bill.

The concern that has been expressed again and again and again is that the bill is not actually going to do the thing it is intended to do, because it is not written in the bill how it is going to expand natural gas into rural, northern and on-reserve communities. Because that stuff isn't there, all the debate has been about: This is how you put it here. The debate has been about: This is how you realize the intention. This is how you ensure, with oversight and transparency, that your intention comes to be.

Also, why do you have advertising on your gas bills, when you yourselves on the other side said that this is not a thing you want?

Those are the things that the debate has been about, and yet, from the government side, there has not been a single speaker who has responded seriously to the points that have been raised on how to make the bill better—not a single person. Everybody goes back to the motherhood-and-apple-pie statements, which absolutely no one is refuting.

I'm just aghast as to how it is that you see this as debate.

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

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Mr. Speaker, we are proposing a program that would, if the legislation is passed, allow more consumers access to affordable natural gas. In too many parts of rural and northern Ontario, families and businesses still do not have access to natural gas.

A few weeks ago, I was speaking with my colleague here from Milton, and he was mentioning to me that in parts of his riding, the rural areas, they still don't have access to natural gas. Right now, they are paying hundreds and hundreds of dollars in terms of, for example, other forms of gas use. Just imagine the amount of money his constituents are going to save if they have access to natural gas, money that they can put in their retirement RRSPs or their children's education fund. As I said—

Mr. Paul Calandra: Small businesses.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Small businesses as well.

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

That takes me to my earlier point that I just mentioned about my colleague from Milton—an \$800 to \$2,500 savings. Individuals can put that money back into their retirement savings or their children's education.

Expanding natural gas would make Ontario communities more attractive for job creation and new business—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. I think we'll return now to the member from Perth-Wellington for his two-minute response to what he has just heard from his colleagues.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: In my two minutes, I really don't know how to respond to what I heard across the floor from the opposition. That was incredible. I don't know what bill they're reading. I don't think they've studied it. They don't understand rural Ontario, obviously. They don't understand Ontario, especially the two members who spoke. That was just incredible.

There is development to be done in rural and northern Ontario. There are subdivisions already planned, already in the books, but they need to get this energy out to them.

The issues that Milverton went through to get that gas pipeline—they were a year late, and they almost had developers pulling out of it because of red tape and other things that kept the natural gas from going to the town.

We've got to stop doing that. Developers and people who want to invest in Ontario are getting tired of this business of filling out paperwork after paperwork and not getting anything done. It costs them a lot of money to do these things. They're interested in coming to this province, yet they get held up all the time with this type of thing.

We promised that we were going to get natural gas to rural and northern Ontario, and we're keeping that promise. That's what we're going to do. We're going to work with the people who know how to put the pipelines in, as to where the best place is to run the pipelines. None of us here know how to install these things, but the people who are in the business know how to do that. We collaborate with them, and they do the job.

I'm very excited about this bill. I think it's going to have a profound effect in my riding, certainly, as it will in all of rural and northern Ontario. We need to get going. We need to get the job done.

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

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I've been very much looking forward to rising to discuss this on third reading. This is a subject that I'm quite passionate about. I believe that access to natural gas is something that is an equity issue.

So far, our debate has been excellent. There have been many important considerations and recommendations that we have discussed here in this Legislature. We've even heard kind and pleasant words across the aisle. I know, Speaker, it's shocking, but it has happened.

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However, when we take a look at this legislation, we see no change. We see none of the recommendations that the opposition has made, including explicitly mentioning rural communities, northern communities and Indigenous communities. In fact, we've heard people across the aisle talk about the 78 communities that this will impact, but they refuse to name them in the legislation. Quite frankly, Speaker, that makes me nervous for what this legislation is actually going to do.

When we take a look at it, we see a government that, frankly, is not listening. They're closing their ears. They are not putting people at the heart of the decisions that they're making.

Speaker, I would suggest that this legislation will become a tremendous black eye for this government. This is something they will not recover from.

We have to differentiate between someone's words and their actions. In bringing this up, Speaker, we see and we have heard the words from this government saying that it will benefit rural communities, and it will benefit northern communities, and sometimes they've even mentioned Indigenous communities. But quite frankly, we don't see the proof here. We don't see the actions. These actions are different than the words we've heard across the aisle, and, quite frankly, that's disturbing.

As I look around, we see the same familiar faces debating this, and we've made, today, many of the same arguments that we've made before. But we have a government that refuses to listen. They refuse to accept constructive criticism.

Debating this bill, quite frankly, makes me envy Sisyphus. It's kind of disheartening. In coming to this House, I felt that we would be able to work together. We've seen quite the opposite from this government.

We have provided reasoned arguments. We have attempted to enhance this legislation. But again, we have a government that is covering its ears and closing its eyes. It really makes me doubt the sincerity of the government.

We've all heard members across the aisle rise and state that they want this bill to bring natural gas to rural Ontario—excellent. We've heard them say they want to bring gas to northern Ontario, and that's excellent. Finally, we've sometimes heard them say they want to bring natural gas to Indigenous communities, so that they can benefit as well. On that, we are on the same page, yet it's still not reflected in this legislation. Why is it not there?

The NDP campaigned on this. It was included in our platform, and—well, we all know that we never really did find the Conservative platform, did we?

Interjection: No.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: No, it never showed up. One of these days, we're going to take a look at a desk, and there it will be. I'm not going to hold my breath.

Mr. Mike Harris: What about the \$7-billion hole in your platform?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: We had a costed platform; you did not. Next time, hopefully, a party would campaign with a costed platform if they actually stand up for fiscal conservatism.

The government has heard many of my colleagues, such as the member from Nickel Belt, talk about the need for natural gas. She has talked about how seniors in their homes have to chop wood, waking up in the middle of the night to go and put another log in their wood stove, because that's simply the only way to heat their home.

We've heard about Indigenous communities, and how they've had to use diesel in some cases to heat, and how this change to natural gas would be such a benefit.

This is something that is a tremendous issue that we have to see done right. But if this government really sincerely wants to adopt these goals, then why are we on the other side still making the same suggestions as we were a month ago?

Again, it makes me wonder what the actual intentions of this bill are. We requested that the bill explicitly state

what its intentions were, but it's still not there. We've been asked to cross our fingers and hope for the best and promises, promises from this government, and it's still not there.

Every member of the government states that this is what they want the bill to accomplish, but they refuse to mention the words "rural," "Indigenous" or "northern communities." Almost every member of the opposition has made this request, and the government refuses to hear us. What originally appeared as an oversight in the bill, something that you might be able to excuse, is now starting to look like a very calculated and deliberate decision. At this point, ignorance and negligence on the government side can't really be put forward as a viable excuse. It seems, then, that the government has every intention of leaving reference to these communities out of Bill 32.

So perhaps it's time for a change of approach. Instead of undertaking the same Sisyphean process of asking the government to include references to northern, Indigenous and rural communities, I'd like to ask the government why they think this bill doesn't need to mention those things. Why is the bill stronger without direct reference to these communities? Why? The members opposite have time to respond to my statement, and I'd like them to, frankly, address these absences, since it seems like a deliberate move on their part. I look forward to these answers.

There's another part of this bill that has never really sat right with me. The government has consistently said that they want to invest in natural gas, but they cancelled a \$100-million fund for natural gas expansion into rural areas. These funds were to ensure that rural communities actually received access to natural gas, and to reduce their dependence on high-carbon diesel and heating oil. It was intended to connect biofuel production on farms to the natural gas grid, which is something essential, something that rural Ontarians have been looking for for years. This money was going to be an investment in Ontario's economy that we could all support very easily, yet the government decided to cancel these funds. So right now, there's no guarantee in Bill 32 that natural gas will even get to rural Ontario, and the government has chosen not to invest in it. This decision actually has halted progress on natural gas expansion projects that were about to commence—people who were just on the brink of receiving it, and they're stuck because of this government.

Speaker, we can measure a government's commitment to projects in this province by how much they're willing to invest. Given that this government has cut \$100 million, is the government really committed to expanding natural gas, or is it more committed to the private natural gas companies that will off-load these costs onto existing consumers? Are these the people in the back rooms?

When we look at this, it's another example of how the words and actions of this government do not align. Without the government investing \$100 million, who is going to pay for the pipeline expansion? The government will say that they're saving taxpayer money, but even Conservatives think this bill will cause natural gas rates to go up.

Tom Adams, the former energy consultant who gave advice to the Conservatives, disagrees with the government's vague and ineffective proposal. He stated that this plan "will directly result in higher overall costs, but I believe the indirect costs could be greater than the direct costs...."

"Wynne's approach"—pardon me, the member from Don Valley West's—oh, it's a quote; I can say Wynne. "Wynne's approach to gas expansion looks temperate and well-considered compared to Ford's approach."

That's from Tom Adams.

This may come as a shock to some members opposite me, but New Democrats are familiar with getting the same old stories from the Liberals and the Tories. Perhaps the government will listen to their old advisers even if they won't listen to the opposition. After all, Adams has a point. Without government investment, it will be existing consumers of natural gas who end up paying for the pipeline expansion. Existing consumers will have to pay higher prices for expenditures that they don't benefit from.

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Combined with the \$100-million cut, the government is taking the natural gas sector down the same dangerous road that the Conservatives, and then the Liberals after them, took with the hydro sector. We all know how that story ended up, and everyone is paying for it now. Everyone across Ontario is suffering under high—astronomically high—hydro rates, and many Ontarians are facing difficult choices as a result: Should you pay for your heat or put groceries in your fridge? Too many people make that choice with hydro, and, quite frankly, I don't think that they should have to make that choice with natural gas either.

We hear all the time that Conservatives oppose the Liberal hydro plan, yet have done nothing substantive to change it. So why are they not making this bill ironclad, so that the possibility of that does not happen to them? There's an opportunity here for you to fix what is going to be a monumental mistake.

Furthermore, it seems kind of strange that this government has also gotten rid of the recommendation to not put partisan advertising on their bills. I can't imagine why they would want to attach their name to someone's skyrocketing natural gas bill. It seems rather odd, doesn't it, Speaker?

We also have to look at the situation in an outside way. If it had been in private industry's interests to expand natural gas, they would have done so already.

I want to bring us back to the 1930s and 1940s, when Bell Canada first wanted to put wires across the country. The federal government was wise; the federal government was intelligent. They told Bell that they could not simply cherry-pick the areas that would be best for them. Instead, they had to put telephone access across the entire country. Thankfully, as a result, we have telephone access across the country.

What we are calling for, in the official opposition, is to ensure that rural, northern and Indigenous communities are specifically mentioned, and those 78 communities are

mentioned by name. That way, we can ensure that those people will actually get access. Instead, the government has said to us, "Trust us. Cross your fingers. Hope for the best."

We've even heard the government say that rates will only go up by \$1. Where is it in the legislation? It's not there. This legislation allows private industry to put its hands into ratepayers' pockets, with absolutely no control. There is no stopping how deeply they can reach, and that's frightening.

This legislation is like Swiss cheese. What we were hoping for in our recommendations was to make sure that this legislation has accountability, has transparency—

Interruption.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Excuse me for interrupting. I don't know if the member from Sarnia-Lambton is aware of it, but you're whistling, sir, and it's interrupting the flow of the conversation. Thank you.

I return to the member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you, Speaker.

So as I was saying, in any piece of legislation we should ensure that there is accountability, there is transparency and there is oversight. What this legislation does is undermine the OEB. It takes away their role to stand up for consumers and to control rates, and to make sure that nobody is being gouged. The government is opening the door for private industry to reach deeply into ratepayers' pockets.

If this passes, every consumer of natural gas will see their bills go up. We've heard across the floor that when people change over to natural gas, they will realize between \$800 and \$2,500 from their heating bills. But there's no guarantee that it will actually reach those people, so those numbers are completely empty. Quite frankly, given the fact that there will be no control on rates, it is complete and utter conjecture. It makes absolutely no sense.

The government has railed against the past Liberals, who had \$230 million and then \$100 million for natural gas expansion, and now it's even worse, because there is nothing. There is no timeline for this. There is no oversight.

We've also heard members opposite mention the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, and I've met with them as well. It is a concern to me because they weren't involved in the announcement of Bill 32. Instead, it was the Ontario Home Builders' Association. We also need to make sure that we pay attention to what would be important for rural communities. We need to make sure that there are other things like broadband and that roads are decent. We see so many different issues that have not been addressed properly.

Quite frankly, Speaker, this bill is going to be a very dark stain on this government. They're going to have to wear this forever. This is opening up people's pockets. While they say it will save taxpayers money, it will cost ratepayers. It is disturbing, to say the least.

I'm going to end my time with the same requests that I've made every single time we've discussed this bill. I

don't think that requesting that the bill include reference to northern, Indigenous and rural communities is controversial whatsoever. This is not a political disagreement between the official opposition and the government. We are in full agreement here. Yet the government has continued to ignore and reject our advice. We want this bill to actually mention what the government says it will accomplish. I'd like to know why the members opposite me think these communities don't need to be listed in this bill.

Just to wrap up: We want to see 78 communities specifically mentioned. We want to see "rural, north and Indigenous" specifically mentioned. This is going to be something very difficult for this government, and I caution them, because this will be something that they will have to wear forever.

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

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise and speak a little bit on the debate today. Expanding access to natural gas is what we're focused on. It's interesting because basically everybody here agrees that we need to expand access to natural gas. The official opposition is now the NDP, the Liberals don't have official party status anymore, and basically they themselves are to blame for the fact that electricity rates have gone up close to 300% in the province of Ontario. Our rural communities and northern Ontario are paying the brunt of it because they don't have access to natural gas, and they're really having a hard time. Our farmers are having a hard time and our industries that don't have natural gas are having a hard time.

I have to say, as somebody who represents a riding in the GTA, that I, like many people in the GTA, before I was elected, didn't often think about rural Ontario and northern Ontario and the struggles they have, but it is a difficult struggle, and I think that here in the Legislature it's topmost on everybody's mind all the time. We are focused on having a lens that forces us to look through every piece of legislation that we pass. We're trying to deregulate the province, and we have to really focus on helping rural and northern Ontario, because without rural and northern Ontario, the GTA and Ottawa areas do not thrive.

We see what happened in Venezuela, when the government tried to run every single part of the country and every single industry. We want to encourage and help and have the atmosphere in place so that industries can be successful, so our farmers can be successful, so northern Ontarians can be successful, and we're going to make sure that happens, Mr. Speaker.

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We've only been here for, I don't know, just a few months, and we've already seen this atmosphere of can-do in Ontario. So happy holidays to everybody listening at home, and we're going to come back in the year 2019 to a better Ontario that's open for business.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I'd like to just recall for everybody here the death by suicide of Karlena

Kamenawatamin at the age of 13, whom my colleague the member from Kiiwetinoong talked about a couple of months ago. I want to recall for everybody the quiet that fell over the House when he talked about her death.

One of the contributing factors in her death was the fact that she lived in a house that had no electricity and had not had any for seven years. There was an extension cord between the house that she lived in and the neighbours' house, and the extremity of the poverty and the deprivation with which she lived was one of the factors that led to her hopelessness and her death.

I want to say that we have an opportunity in this House to make this right. We have an opportunity to put into this bill that natural gas will be expanded to the communities like the one that Karlena came from, so that no other child will face that deprivation. The refusal of the government to take up the repeated suggestions that this bill not be just intentional but specific has become really problematic. You don't need to take our word for it because, ultimately, you're not answering to us. Ultimately, you're answering to the people from Bearskin Lake and other communities that do not have natural gas and to which this bill does not promise to give natural gas. You're answering in three and a half years' time to the voters of Ontario.

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

Ms. Jill Dunlop: Thank you to the member from London North Centre for his comments.

As you know, Simcoe North is an electoral district that is made up primarily of small towns and rural communities. I was born and raised within rural Simcoe North, and I've been fortunate enough to raise my own family in the same area. Living in small-town, rural Ontario provides for a wonderful lifestyle. I'm sure many members present in the House today would gladly attest to that.

To name a few of these benefits, rural Ontario is an escape from the traffic, noise and congestion of the modern-day city. It is a place where residents can embrace the great outdoors and participate in a variety of outdoor recreational activities. Rural Ontario communities stand together. They are made up of proud people who understand what it means to be a good neighbour and a community member.

Mr. Speaker, living in rural can also present challenges. In addition to challenges surrounding accessibility—and we often have a very large snowfall in Simcoe North, which we already have this season—one of our primary challenges as a rural riding is access to reliable and affordable heating and energy options, especially for constituents who live in some of the more remote areas of our riding.

With this in mind, I am proud of our government's commitment to providing natural gas rate protection for consumers and expanding natural gas distribution systems throughout the province, as represented through the Access to Natural Gas Act, 2018. If passed, this legislation will support Ontario families and businesses by allowing more consumers access to natural gas. This will give many Ontario families an alternative heating option that is more

affordable than electric heating, propane or oil. By extending natural gas through this proposed legislation, this will also make Ontario communities more attractive for business development, which will ultimately create better job opportunities in rural Ontario.

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

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Again, there was some interesting irony that occurred. An opposition member was talking about expensive holes, and it brought to mind a really expensive hole in Toronto. It was a \$600-million hole that would have been the Eglinton subway, but the PC government decided to fill it in. What a waste of money.

Anyway, the issue here is about the whole matter being disingenuous. This really isn't about providing gas to communities that need it the most. This is about encouraging the development industry to eat up farmland and be the fait accompli about this whole building-on-the-greenbelt thing we heard from the Premier during the campaign—which was immediately withdrawn, but we know it still exists out there.

You're asking me, the member from Humber River–Black Creek, who represents in part the Jane and Finch community, which is subsidizing the rest of this province when it comes to auto insurance rates, to now subsidize the development industry, or to help them make a lot of money building on farmland. This is coming on the backs of my community and communities across the province.

In fact, there was a principle from the OEB saying that the people who benefit from natural gas investments are the ones who should be paying for them. But that's not what this government believes in.

The grant, in a sense, would encourage and direct where the gas was going, to ensure it goes to the people who need it the most.

The other PC member talked about the business industry. Business is out there to make money. They're not out there to help anyone; that's not their priority. Their priority is to make money. These gas companies and the development industry are just going to go and try to make money out there, and all the consumers are going to have to pay for that, and this government is going to wear it.

I hope that in the partisan advertising, when the bills go out in my community, you say, "Brought to you by the PC government."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): That's the end of the questions and comments. We'll turn to the member from London North Centre to respond.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the members from Beaches–East York, Thornhill, Simcoe North and Humber River–Black Creek for their comments.

To start off, I also wanted to respond to the comments earlier from the member for Parry Sound–Muskoka. He said that within his house he's with propane, and he actually said that natural gas would never reach him, which I've got to say is probably a Freudian slip.

Thank you to the member from Beaches–East York for your very good, very thoughtful and impactful comments

about Karlena. This is why natural gas access is an equity issue. It is something that everyone in the province should be able to have. We, as legislators, need to make sure that people actually get it.

To the member from Thornhill: Yes, people on farms do have a hard time. Hydro rates are out of control. But with the lens you're using to look at legislation, and talking about deregulation, let's look at what happened to hydro. Let's never forget that.

The member from Simcoe North mentioned that there would be rate protection within this legislation. Quite frankly, I completely disagree. It is not in this legislation whatsoever. In fact, the glaring absence of it is what we are very, very concerned about.

To the member from Humber River–Black Creek, the mentioning of the Eglinton subway—oh, my goodness. It is like this legislation writ large, isn't it? This legislation is like a piece of Swiss cheese. You could drive a truck through it; it is full of so many quite conscious omissions, so many very serious gaps in logic. It's just a great concern.

This legislation is going to allow private industry to fleece consumers.

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

Mr. Daryl Kramp: I rise today, and it's a privilege to be able to speak on this Access to Natural Gas Act, Bill 32. As you may have heard a number of times in this Legislature, but it certainly bears repeating: another promise made, another promise kept.

Our party consulted widely over these past four years, and we heard about a few rights, but we heard about many, many wrongs: the apparent rights of some in Ontario to less expensive energy, and the many, many wrongs of the government in power at that time, a government that we now have thankfully replaced.

These consultations are something we're continuing on many fronts, now that we're in government. They led us to see many, many gaps in the course of the challenges and the ongoing issues with existing infrastructure right across this province.

We saw and heard about some states of affairs that almost seemed as if a previous government had either been in denial or, potentially, even had willfully chosen to disadvantage some communities. I would certainly hope that was not the case.

1730

Fact, Mr. Speaker: Canada has sufficient energy reserves that we are a net exporter, and we could export more if we had additional pipeline capacity to tidewater. That's another drastic story. It's a sad story going on across this country, when we see the challenges faced by the other provinces due to the issues under way over the past three years since Trudeau the younger became Prime Minister and has basically brought the pipeline process almost to a standstill. Of course, we've all heard it. It's a sad story; it really, really is. We see the hurt, the pain, the lost business, the suffering and the lives shattered.

We're a nation where we should be able to work together, Mr. Speaker. So, yes, it's deceitful. There have been

broken promises, and certainly a lot of heartbreak. Unfortunately, yes, it is what it is. It's another typical Liberal tale.

But that isn't the only transportation issue that is of concern to Ontarians. We all have fish to fry much, much closer to home—or rather, we would if the cooks had access to the energy to do it. That's the gist of another Canadian conundrum, with an Ontario chapter that has been left to just gather dust.

Now the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers says that Canada has natural gas reserves of almost 1,100 trillion cubic feet. Mr. Speaker, that's a lot of zeros. That's even bigger than the debt left behind by the previous Liberal government. Indeed, CAPP estimates that that is enough natural gas to supply Canada for over 300 years.

Let me interpret those words very, very simply: Canada has lots of natural gas. There are no ifs, ands or buts about that.

As a result, the price is reasonably low by other standards, making it an ideal fuel with which to heat homes; to cook fish or other foods, whatever your personal preference happens to be—I love eggs, omelettes in the morning, from a fresh gas-filled stove—and to power workshops and factories and, to bluntly put it, to create a significant number of jobs.

Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker: We need to put Ontario back on track. In order to put Ontario back on track, we need more jobs. We need to have affordable energy. We have to have people access a fuel that is reasonable, accessible and relatively inexpensive.

Indeed, about one third of Canada's entire energy needs today are met by natural gas. As we all know, as we've stated, it's abundant, it's relatively easy to transport through pipelines, and of course, it burns more cleanly than any other hydrocarbon.

But the prior government must have thought that supplying natural gas to communities and to constituents far and wide was a problem not to be solved. Their attitude to pipelines: "Oh, well, let's not worry about it." What did they see? They just saw roadblocks instead of progress.

Of course, the previous government didn't want to rock this here natural-gas-distribution boat with a few of their cronies. They must have thought that only Ontarians deserved access to natural gas, not all those potential customers who could be serviced and served by willing natural gas pipeline companies.

Yes, under the previous government's restrictions, private sector companies were limited from participating in natural gas expansion, portions of which instead were then managed—of course, who else would pay?—by the taxpayer, by taxpayer-funded programs.

As we all know, Mr. Speaker, the private sector, for the large part, will spend their money much more efficiently and effectively than government. That meant that a lot of smaller communities, then, were just simply shut out.

Indeed, our government has found significant demand for expanding natural gas access to Ontario communities which could be served at a reasonable cost.

Let me quote Premier Ford, who said this at the International Plowing Match and Rural Expo in Pain Court near Chatham-Kent in September. He said, "By cancelling the cap-and-trade carbon tax, we have already acted to bring natural gas prices down for Ontario families and businesses. Now we are taking the next step"—that's what this bill is about, Speaker; the next step—"to ensure that the benefits of natural gas expansion are shared throughout the entire province."

The people want it and need it, and they must have a government that will deliver it.

During the June election, our five core commitments included putting money in people's pockets and creating and protecting jobs. It's that simple, Mr. Speaker. It's tough to do only if a government doesn't have the will to be able to put the pedal to the metal.

We looked at all of these issues through that kind of lens. First, we heard from families. We heard from businesses and communities. All across Ontario, we heard that natural gas expansion was tremendously important in order to grow businesses, create jobs and compete. So, Mr. Speaker, then, check that box.

We heard that switching to natural gas can save an average residential customer between \$800 and \$2,500 a year. That's a lot of money to an average family. Check that box.

We heard that most Ontarians who lack access to natural gas live—where is the need there?—in the rural, the remote and the First Nation communities.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Wow. So bring it where there is none.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Yes—where we committed to do that. Once again, more boxes that need checking. Isn't that amazing? Putting a product where it is needed. That's the purpose of this bill.

Of course, we heard that Ontario's agri-food sector is one of the world's most diverse. We're so proud of our agri-food sector. Almost 50,000 farms, \$106 billion into the province's GDP, supporting 1.2 million jobs—that's one in eight Ontario workers—all as a result of the agricultural community and their desires, needs and wants for improvements in their bottom line due to natural gas.

The prior government's checklist only covered spending. More, more, more—not doing more, just spending more; not solving problems or making things better for more people.

In contrast, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce recently wrote that Premier Ford's plan to develop a new natural gas program will not only help to make life more affordable for Ontarians, but it is going to boost job creation and economic growth in rural and northern communities.

As we see, given the world economic climate, given the challenges that we all face, we all understand that we have to take every advantage that we have and maximize it to the highest degree of potential. Natural gas is that asset that we need to be able to work with.

The Liberals just simply abandoned these communities, though. They left them to cook and heat with increasingly expensive electricity.

Indeed, what this was—this wasn't a failure in technology; this wasn't a failure in a lack of a product. It was the failure of political will. Back home in the rural area where I come from, they say, "Where there's a will, there's a way." So what do we have? More natural gas availability for more people, including, as I mentioned before, low-income, First Nations communities, and rural communities already beset by high living costs. The Liberals simply lacked the will to find the way. They failed, but we didn't and we won't. We found that there was a need and a demand, and we have found the ways and we have found the means to meet that need and that demand, and that has led us to have the will to right the wrong.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm here today to thank our Premier and our cabinet and all of my colleagues who have worked so hard to be able to bring forward a bill that's going to absolutely change the lives of so many people. It's going to give them an affordable opportunity to stay in a rural area, where they can raise their family in a competitive manner, operate a small business and grow, and see their children reach the fruition that they believe in.

What bothers me, of course, is that I've seen the previous government take a look at these opportunities—and they knew they existed, but they didn't address the need.

So now that we have a government that is for the people, we've made a very, very serious and conscious decision to take actions and activity. We've been a very, very aggressive government over this first six months, Mr. Speaker, as you well know. Sitting in the chair, you have heard bill after bill and resolution after resolution moving this province forward in a very positive and aggressive manner.

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Our Minister of Infrastructure said it well when he said, "Expanding natural gas will make Ontario communities more attractive for job creation and new businesses.... This is part of our government plan to bring quality jobs back to Ontario."

We've seen the situation as of late with Oshawa. We need jobs. We need more opportunities. We have to entice and create a business climate to be able to have our businesses grow, prosper, expand and innovate. We have to send a very clear message, because attitude in many cases is everything. We have to send a clear message that Ontario is open for business.

Mr. Speaker, I could quote a number of people. As a matter of fact, if I were to quote organizations and individuals who are supportive of this bill, I would, unfortunately, run out of time today, I would run out of time tomorrow and the next day, because the list would go on ad nauseam. It would literally be a great read for Hansard. But to this particular point, because I do want to move forward and help bring closure to this bill, I will just simply mention a couple: Mr. Vaccaro of the Ontario Home Builders' Association, Mr. Currie, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture—and the list goes on. I will maybe refrain from that right now because that's an obvious conclusion.

The scope of change for Ontario is significant. With this bill, over 70 communities will potentially gain natural gas pipeline connections. Estimates are that 33,000 households stand to gain access to natural gas with this bill. Mr. Speaker, that's life changing for many of these people.

The Access to Natural Gas Act, Bill 32—obviously, as we see now, it's going to help a lot of people. It's going to power jobs. It's going to show that Ontario is open for business, and, respectfully, even off the main highways. A lot of people would just simply travel Highway 7, Highway 6, the 401, the 400, the 407; they don't realize that we have millions of kilometres of road in this province. As a matter of fact, I have probably over 200,000 kilometres of road in my riding alone.

Access to natural gas would just be a dream for many people. We've been able to bring natural gas in this last few years by concerted effort. We provided natural gas to rural communities—Madoc, Marmora, Tweed, Stirling—and helped create industry, manufacturing sites and development. That's the kind of activity we need across this province. All of our rural areas that are not serviced easily, where there is not a strong business case to just run a simple line and feed thousands of people—well, that is a simple business decision, where the economics of business would dictate they would do that. The purpose of this bill is, where there is not as strong a business case, to be able to facilitate a process where a number of people who would absolutely be denied the opportunity now have not only hope and vision, but they have a government that is actually going to do something about it.

This bill presents just a preview. That's all it is. This is not the end result, Mr. Speaker. We've only been here a few months. I'd like to sit here about three years from now and say, "My goodness, look at the number of people we've been able to help." But one by one, one dozen by 100, 1,000 by 10,000, 10,000 by 100,000, we are determined to find positive results for our constituents and, of course, the province of Ontario. It's the place Ontario used to be—a very, very proud nation. We were, as many people would recognize, the economic engine of this country, and then to, all of a sudden, turn into a literal basket case is disturbing.

I was fortunate. I grew up when Ontario was literally just rocking and rolling. If you had a job, wonderful; if you didn't, there was one around the bend tomorrow. But tell that to our young people right now; it just is not the situation. Tell that to the people who are losing their jobs. Tell that to the people who are not competitive. We have to have every tool at our disposal to bring about that kind of change.

Going forward—I look across the aisle at the other members—I would hope that we would have broad support for this bill. I've heard a number of the other members across the House state, quite frankly, the obvious: Yes, it's needed. So I would hope, going forward, that we have not only their support, but their encouragement, because the constituents of the official opposition over there are no different than constituents of mine. They know we need these services. Even the constituents of the

previous government, which was found lacking on this file, know that we need these services. Across this province, Mr. Speaker, we need this bill.

Despite some political chatter from some of the opposition coming out with—

Interjection.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: You know, it's very difficult for them to defend the indefensible.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Short-sighted. They're very short-sighted.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Really, it's a challenge for them to try to find a way to pick a hole in something that is so obviously good. But of course, that's the role of opposition. We understand that. If they were to be honest, they would look across at the member standing here—it's good to see them smiling over there, because they would say, "You know, Daryl, I think you're right on this one."

That's okay. I'll accept that silent, grudging respect, hopefully, from them, because I do believe, even when it comes to this bill, that a number of people are going to support this, because this should not be a political football to be kicked around. We'll leave that to the Grey Cup and the Super Bowl.

This is the way forward that will help ease the pain of high energy costs. Is it going to provide 100% coverage across this entire province? Sadly, no, and admittedly, no. Try to step up to that when we have the Precambrian shield coming down and we've got granite that is basically non-fissured and runs for 500 miles. The cost of construction is unbelievable.

But will this be a most welcome and needed step forward? Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. After years of stagnation and even higher energy costs, we are now closing the books on that chapter, aggressively and decisively moving forward to provide the conditions for a more affordable Ontario, a more industrious Ontario, a more competitive Ontario and a more prosperous Ontario. And how, Mr. Speaker? By a government for the people; promises made, promises kept.

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

Mr. Gurratan Singh: The crux of the discussion that we're having today, the root of what we're all trying to address and all trying to fix, is this question around affordability: the fact that across the board, people are struggling to make ends meet. In the north, they're struggling to pay for heating. They often have to choose between paying their credit card or paying their heating bill.

This is unacceptable. This is not the kind of society we should be living in, especially in Canada. We have so much abundance. We have so much at our disposal. That in some parts of our province and nation there are aspects and communities who are struggling to pay for the very basic necessities for survival, like heating—it's across the board, though. We look at Toronto. We see that affordability is becoming, in some communities, the number one issue.

It is, to me, completely unacceptable that two working professionals in Toronto are unable to rent a home, let

alone buy a home. These are issues that we're facing now. Affordability is across the board. These are issues that are striking home to a generation of people. The economic climate in the past was such that working people could afford to heat their homes, working people could afford to rent a home, buy a home and own a home, but we've gone in a wrong direction. We've gone on a path that is pushing people further and further towards the edges.

The concern which has been leveled is: Does this bill address these issues? Does this bill create more affordability in regard to natural gas, or does it create further issues in regard to the environment, something that is also required for our existence, for our living? This is also ultimately becoming a discussion of what direction we want to go forward in as a province. What direction are we going to prioritize? Are we prioritizing things like the environment and affordability, or other factors?

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

Mr. Paul Calandra: I want to thank my colleague for his discourse. It really highlighted the problem with the Liberal-NDP coalition government of the last 15 years: the absolute, abject failure.

Some of the members across the aisle have talked about northern communities. They've talked about rural and remote communities and Indigenous communities, and how this bill doesn't address bringing natural gas there. I don't know if it's a shocker to people, but bringing natural gas to communities—you do it for communities that don't actually have natural gas right now. Those are communities that are rural, that are remote, and those are the ones that are getting natural gas.

To hear the member opposite talk about affordability, when you look at what we've accomplished just today, today we repealed the Green Energy Act, the job-killing Liberal-NDP Green Energy Act. It is absolutely obscure to hear members opposite talk about the cost of living in the province of Ontario when, over 15 years, the Liberal-NDP coalition have given the people of Ontario a massive debt, a massive deficit, higher taxes, and a Green Energy Act that cost taxpayers billions of dollars, that cost homeowners, regardless of whether you were in rural or urban areas, hundreds of thousands of extra dollars. They support a carbon tax which will take even more money out of the pockets of Ontario residents. They supported every single thing that that Liberal government did. That's why it's easy for me to call them part of the Liberal-NDP coalition.

Here, they have an opportunity. They have an opportunity to turn their backs on the past 15 years, when they voted with the Liberals 95% of the time, and to really put Ontario taxpayers first; to look at the over 33,000 homes in over 70 communities that will get access to natural gas; but more than that, to look at what we're doing as a whole-of-government approach to put more money back into the pockets of the people of Ontario, and to open up this province for business so that we have the funds and

resources we need to support Ontarians for many decades to come.

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

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: I recently listened to my colleague the member from Oshawa talk about her experience in committee, when she went through all of the various amendments that she and the NDP put through that would actually make the bill do what it said it was going to do, what it is intended to do, and have the oversight it needs to do that, and how many of the government members said, “You know, those are great ideas. They’re absolutely wonderful ideas.” But they decided not to follow through on them. They ultimately rejected them.

Along with my colleague the member from London North Centre, I have to ask, what is going on here? For weeks, we have been saying the same thing. At the beginning, it looks like carelessness; it looks like negligence; it looks like a poorly written bill. But you never ascribe to malice what is actually the fault of carelessness. Yet at this point, it begins to look like malice. It begins to look like there’s a reason that these things aren’t in the bill. It begins to look like the bill is not intended to go to northern, rural and on-reserve Indigenous communities; that it is actually intended to go to new subdivisions—which, by the way, do not, at the moment, have that gas but could easily get it otherwise.

So this is not intended to reach folks who need government pushes and bills to get gas to them. It’s not the equity issue that it ought to be.

I think it’s really important that the government take a look at its processes as well as its substance, because this is where the problems lie.

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

Mr. Mike Harris: We’ve heard a lot of talk in here today about how the intentions of this bill are not for natural gas to reach northern Ontario and rural areas.

I’ve had the opportunity to live in northern Ontario for 26 years of my life, then moving down to a rural area. The majority of the riding I represent is a rural area—the three townships that horseshoe around Kitchener-Waterloo and then the southwest portion of Kitchener. So I think I’ve got a pretty good grasp of what northern Ontario and rural Ontario really need when it comes to seeing expansion of natural gas.

We can all talk about the cost benefits and how much money it will save people, but the quality of life and the improvement in the quality of life that natural gas can bring to somebody is very important. We’ve touched a little bit on that here today. The members opposite, unfortunately, often try to politicize situations that really shouldn’t be politicized, and we’ve talked a little bit about that here today.

Our government wants to make sure that when we talk about where this natural gas expansion is going to take place, we’re talking about 33,000 new homes and over 70 new communities. We’re not talking about, like the

member for Markham–Stouffville said, bringing this to areas of the GTA that already have natural gas. That’s not the point of this bill. The point of this bill is to make sure that we are improving the quality of life for people in rural areas; that includes rural southwestern Ontario, rural eastern Ontario and rural northern Ontario. I think it’s really important that we highlight that.

The rhetoric that comes from the other side of this House about what this bill says or doesn’t say—I can’t even talk about it anymore. I’m so sick and tired of it, Mr. Speaker; I’m sorry. But we’ve got—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Thank you. And now, to conclude, we’ll return to the member from Hastings–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Daryl Kramp: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope I have another 20 minutes to be able to finish off here. Of course, I’d like to thank all my colleagues in the House for their thoughts today and their comments. I recognize that while we may have some difference of opinion, I think all the comments are well intentioned. I would hope that we can move forward and try to do what we’re all here for: try to provide some relief for the citizens in our communities and make sure that we spend the money effectively.

To the members from Brampton East, Markham–Stouffville, Beaches–East York and Kitchener–Conestoga, thank you. It’s tremendously important that we have a broad section of our communities here today, too.

The member from Brampton East thought it was not really acceptable to deal with an issue like this in the manner in which this bill is brought forward. Well, Mr. Speaker, it’s very simple. It’s a very straightforward bill. It’s called supply-demand. There is a huge demand in our rural communities for a reasonable, affordable energy source. That’s the purpose. It is that simple. That’s where the demand is and that’s where the affordability is not, and that’s why we have to be able to marry those two.

In Markham–Stouffville, the cost of living—my goodness. I’m envious about the cost of living in some of the urban cores. I know, be it a bedroom community in the Ottawa area, a family-of-four income, roughly \$106,000 to \$110,000—in a lot of rural areas, as an example, in my riding, the average income for a family of four would be \$43,000 or \$44,000, a dramatic difference.

It’s important that we try to find some way to be able to bridge that gap so that our people who are disadvantaged in a lot of our rural areas for a wide number of reasons have the opportunity,

Am I over, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): You are, sir. Thank you so much. Thank you to all our colleagues for your well-behaved discussion and debate this afternoon.

Third reading debate adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Percy Hatfield): Seeing that the time is really close to our mandatory finish time, I now deem that this session is over. We will be adjourned until 9 o’clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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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, Chris Glover
Christine Hogarth, Logan Kanapathi
Daryl Kramp, Natalia Kusendova
Amarjot Sandhu, Mike Schreiner
Dave Smith, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Daisy Wai
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

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Peggy Sattler
Toby Barrett, Catherine Fife
Goldie Ghamari, Jim McDonell
Norman Miller, Suze Morrison
Michael Parsa, Peggy Sattler
Kinga Surma
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
Will Bouma, Paul Calandra
Lorne Coe, 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

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Deepak Anand
Deepak Anand, Doly Begum
Jeff Burch, Amy Fee
Michael Gravelle, Joel Harden
Belinda Karahalios, Robin Martin
Sheref Sabawy, Nina Tangri
Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

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