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Tuesday 8 March 2016

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Mardi 8 mars 2016

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 8 March 2016

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 8 mars 2016

The House met at 0900.

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

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that, pursuant to standing order 47 and notwithstanding any other standing order or special order of the House relating to Bill 173, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact or amend various statutes, when the bill is next called as a government order, the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill without further debate or amendment, and at such time the bill shall be ordered referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; and

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on Tuesday, March 22, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Wednesday, March 23, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Thursday, March 24, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 173:

—Notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

—That the deadline for requests to appear be 1 p.m. on Thursday, March 17, 2016; and

—That witnesses be scheduled to appear before the committee on a first-come first-served basis; and

—That each witness will receive up to five minutes for their presentation, followed by nine minutes for questions from committee members; and

—That the deadline for written submissions be 6 p.m. on Thursday, March 24, 2016; and

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 12 p.m. on Tuesday, March 29, 2016; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Wednesday, April 6, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. and Thursday, April 7, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill;

On Thursday, April 7, 2016, at 4 p.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. At this time, the Chair shall allow one 20-minute waiting period, pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Monday, April 11, 2016. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by the committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and

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

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

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

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

Mr. John Yakabuski: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'd like to congratulate the government House leader on the birth of his lovely daughter, Elliana, and welcome him back to the House.

I can see that Jim Bradley trained him well: First day back, time allocation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That's not a point of order; however, it's a nice gesture on your part to recognize a new birth to our government House leader.

Mr. Naqvi has moved government notice of motion 63.

Interjection: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Dispense.

Back to the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I do want to thank the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke for his kind remarks,

and I want to thank all the members of the House for their kind wishes to myself and Christine on the birth of our daughter, Elliana Shirley Sanam Naqvi.

Elliana was born on February 19 at the Ottawa Civic Hospital in the great riding of Ottawa Centre at 1:17 p.m. She is, if you will indulge me in saying, absolutely gorgeous—I love my daughter. Elliana is doing great, and Christine is recovering very well, as well. Rafi, our almost four-year-old son is in love with his sister, Elli. There's an incredible bond that is being developed between the two. It was an amazing two weeks to be home with the family—with Rafi, Elli and Christine. It was tough to leave the family at home this morning to be here with all of you, my good friends.

I do want to take a moment to speak on this important motion. I had the opportunity to view the budget from home on the parliamentary channel around 1 o'clock in the morning when I was looking after my daughter—that was a perfect time to watch the speech. I felt very strongly that the bill associated with the budget is an important piece of legislation. It really continues with the government's plan to create jobs and grow our economy in Ontario.

As you know, we previously committed to investing more than $134 billion over 10 years in priority projects such as roads and bridges, public transit, hospitals and schools. We are building on this plan; we are building Ontario up with an additional $3-billion commitment, bringing the government's total infrastructure investment to more than $137 billion over the next 10 years. That is an unprecedented investment in our communities in every single part of our province, to make sure we are building a province that is modern and ready for 21st-century challenges.

That kind of investment will result in about $160 billion over 12 years starting in 2014-15, which, as I said, is the largest-ever investment in public infrastructure in Ontario's history. These planned investments will support, on average, more than 110,000 jobs each year, again benefiting people in all our respective communities across the province.

In the 2016 budget, our government is proposing to modernize student financial assistance to make post-secondary education more accessible and affordable. Speaker, this is an important element. I have the great honour of representing Carleton University, as part of Ottawa Centre, where I speak to students all the time, and I can tell you that following the budget, there has been wide support for this important initiative that was announced in the budget. Under the proposed system, average tuition will be free for students with financial need from families with incomes of $50,000 or lower.

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These are just a few of the changes proposed in Bill 173, the Jobs for Today and Tomorrow Act (Budget Measures), 2016. This bill continues the government's plan to build Ontario up and deliver on its number one priority, which is growing the economy and creating jobs across the province. This bill ensures that we continue to build Ontario up by investing in our future. It is important that we move forward with Bill 173 and bring it before the committee. In the last Parliament, this Legislature was ground to a halt and was unable to move forward on a lot of important bills, such as budget bills. Only 39% of government bills were passed in the last minority government; that's compared to more than three quarters of bills that were passed going back to 1990.

Voters of Ontario have sent us a clear message in 2014: They want our government, the legislators, to get on with the business of governing in their best interests. It is time that we end second reading and refer the bill to the committee. In committee, stakeholders will present their views, members of the communities will have an opportunity to contribute further to the bill and we will be able to hear directly from the public on their thoughts about this important piece of legislation. In committee, members will also have an opportunity to move amendments to the bill, which is an important part of the process of our parliamentary democracy.

At the same time, this House can move to substantive debate on other important matters that are also before the House. There are a number of important pieces of legislation that have already been introduced which the government would like to debate in the House and move through the legislative process. I'll give you three examples: Bill 100, Supporting Ontario's Trails Act; Bill 151, the Waste-Free Ontario Act; and Bill 172, the Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act, another very important piece of legislation.

We would like to spend time debating some of these other important pieces of legislation currently before the House, but we cannot until Bill 173 is dealt with. Therefore, I very much urge all members in this House to support this motion and Bill 173 and help pass this bill as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Before I recognize the official opposition for further debate, I just want to make one point clear: The votes on second and third reading may be deferred, pursuant to standing order 28(h); and that, in the case of any division relating to any proceedings on the bill, the division bell shall be limited to five minutes.

Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this time allocation motion. This is something that we've seen, literally, time and time again from the Liberal government. They say one thing, but they really mean the exact opposite. They say they want to be open and transparent, but shutting off debate about this budget is exactly the opposite of that, so why would they want to do that? It's because life just got more unaffordable for everybody in the province of Ontario, and this government wants to limit the amount of time that we here in the Legislature can talk about this. That's the purpose of what they're doing; let's make that very clear. They do not want us standing here, in the Legislature, to put a microscope on this budget and be able to talk about the things that have indeed made life more expensive here in Ontario.

The tax credits that had helped children, students, seniors and families are being eliminated. In fact, the vast majority of seniors will see the price of their prescription drugs double; 92% of seniors will see their prescription price double. That's just a fact; it's an indisputable fact.

Speaker, we also have very serious concerns about anything this government tells us. They have lost all credibility, and I'll go through some of the reasons why that has happened. The budget has now confirmed that the government is indeed using one-time money from the sale of Hydro, as well as contingency funds, to make their deficit appear smaller. Only a couple of months ago, they were bragging that the deficit forecast went from $8.5 billion to $7.5 billion. But if you look at page 100 in the fall economic statement, it tells you how. They used sale of Hydro money and plunked that into revenue. It's one-time money; it's not going to happen again and again and again. That tells us we have a structural deficit in the province. It means that our spending is higher than the money we take in. If you bring in one-time money to appear to balance, that solves the dilemma that day but not the issue that spending is higher than revenue.

In a couple of years, after this one-time revenue runs out—of course, a couple of years brings us just to the 2018 election, when the one-time revenue will run out—you are going to see an all-out assault on our budget, Speaker. You are going to see a deficit balloon all over again, because it has been masked. In fact, the Financial Accountability Officer referred to the Liberal budget as vague and uncertain. He went on to say, "Maintaining balanced budgets beyond 2017-18 will likely prove challenging." Why? Again, they are using one-time money. By that we mean from the sale of assets: the sale of Hydro One, the sale of LCBO headquarters and quite possibly the sale of 250 LCBO stores, unless we thwarted it yesterday, and the sale of the OPG headquarters across the street. Those are one-time assets that are going to be sold by this government.

Bank of Montreal BMO Capital Markets described it this way: "Asset sales of $5.7 billion ... are one-time in nature, and don't address any underlying structural deficit." Speaker, that sounds kind of familiar. We've been saying that on this side of the aisle for two years, and now we have not only the Financial Accountability Officer coming out and acknowledging that but we have BMO Capital Markets using almost the exact wording that we have been using here for two years.

Further, Speaker, Bryne Purchase, Ontario's former chief economist and deputy minister at many ministries, stated, "The added revenue from cap-and-trade and the Hydro One sale helped to make the provincial numbers look better." Everyone understands; we've all seen through this charade now. We understand what they're doing: They're taking one-time sales and propping up their revenue number. This is fake math; it's voodoo math, and it's a shell game with taxpayers' money. That's the biggest part of what they don't want us standing here talking about. That's why they're time-allocating this: to get us out of here and not let us talk anymore about this budget and what it's doing to families.

Let me take a few minutes, Speaker, and tell you what it's doing to families, because life is getting more expensive for the people of Ontario, thanks to this 2016 budget. Of course you've got the obligatory sin taxes on alcohol and tobacco; they're going up. Wine prices will increase by 4%, and there will be a minimum price put on alcoholic ciders. The government talks about increased availability of wine, but their plan won't be fully implemented for nine years—except the price goes up today.

When we talk about cap-and-trade, that's something they really don't want to hear. I want to stop for a moment and commend our member from Huron–Bruce, who has done an exceptional job on this cap-and-trade file. She has shown us exactly what is going to happen to the pocketbooks of those in Ontario and what won't be happening to the greenhouse gas emissions, thanks to this Liberal design of cap-and-trade. So I thank you very, very much.

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Look, climate change is a very serious challenge; nobody is going to argue that. The government needs a credible plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but you've also got to protect taxpayers and our economy. What we've seen now is that this government is taking advantage. They're preying on the goodwill the people of Ontario have towards climate change. We want to see something done. This government is preying on that goodwill and using it as a tax grab. We've seen that from all of the financial services, who have said that this cap-and-trade is one time.

You would have heard the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change stand up and say, "No, no. It's protected by law. That money must go into"—X projects. Well, if you look at the projects—and it's interesting: They did exactly the same thing with Hydro One. They told us that the money had to go specifically into transit and infrastructure, and ostensibly, it did. It went into transit and infrastructure, but that money was already budgeted. So they took the already budgeted money out of the bottom end of that and used it to lower their deficit. The transit and infrastructure fund did not change with that influx of money from Hydro One. It didn't change the amount they spent. They just took that money and used it to artificially lower their deficit.

Now they're doing exactly the same thing with the cap-and-trade money. They talk about how it must be used for the various projects. Transit is one of them. So here we go again. They're going to put that cap-and-trade money—now, we're talking big money here, Speaker. This is $1.9 billion annually. We're talking about putting that money, yes, into transit. They'll tie a green ribbon around every project you can imagine and say, "This was thanks to the cap-and-trade money." But all that money that was already budgeted, they'll be carving that out of the bottom and stuffing it into the deficit. That's exactly how they plan to lower the deficit, and it's all imaginary, Speaker. There's nothing new to be done about climate change with their budget. It's a shame, and it's a sham. I want that very, very clear.

This $1.9 billion will raise the price of gasoline 4.3 cents a litre, and that's before tax, of course. You'll be paying about $400 a year, Speaker, in new gasoline taxes at the pump. Natural gas: The experts tell us that in only a few years from now, this will add about $475 to the average family's natural gas bill, once this program is up and running. This is already on top of the skyrocketing hydro bills that families we all hear from just cannot afford to pay.

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: You're right. It's about a $1,000 hit, just on those items alone, from cap-and-trade.

The Premier, before the budget, said, "Oh, great news coming in the budget: We're going to help you lower your hydro bills." It was insulting to read just about the only line in that almost-400-page budget, the only line about the seniors and families who cannot afford their hydro bills. The only line was: "We've got something for you. From cap-and-trade, we're going to give you $2 a month off your hydro bill." Well, thank you very much, considering that in January alone your hydro bill went up $100. So thanks for the toonie, but you're not solving the problem.

There are families in Ontario—and these members here on the Liberal side were with us as we sat in the pre-budget hearing in Ottawa last year, and we heard from Jennifer, who said that because her hydro bill is so high, she has to decide whether to heat or eat.

That is the Ontario that this Liberal Party has created. That is the Ontario that is seeing all aspects deteriorating, from businesses to the families who cannot afford to pay their bills. This budget is an assault on families, students, seniors and children.

Here's an example: seniors' drug costs. According to Kathleen Wynne, if you're a wealthy senior who earns more than $19,300—if you're that wealthy—you can now afford to have the cost of your drugs double. The ODB, the drug benefit, will go from $100 to $170 and for every prescription they get they have to pay an additional dollar. That's double. That's the assault that this government is putting on seniors.

If you participated in the home renovation tax credit—if you needed a wheelchair ramp, if you needed other things to help you in your home—that's all gone now. They didn't mention that in the budget speech. The budget speech was all aspiration but no operation.

This is what's happening on the ground: Families are struggling. If you have kids, you would have used the children's activity tax credit. That's to help your kids with soccer, hockey, and all of the sports and activities. That was a great tax credit, which is gone today. This is an assault on children and their parents. This is an assault on students, an assault on seniors and it's an assault on families.

If you wanted to enjoy hiking, camping, hunting or fishing, or decided to get a liquor licence, an event permit or a court application, every single one of those, despite what we've heard from the Minister of Natural Resources over and over, where he continues to either not understand his file or never to have read the budget—pages 190 and 191 are very clear. They tell us that service fees are going up, and they list all the fees, including hunting and fishing licences and parks. It's very clear, and this minister and this government keep denying that that occurred.

Pages 190 and 191 appeared in my budget. I don't know why they can't see it in their budget. There's something really wrong when the government not only does this to the taxpayers of Ontario—puts this punitive financial strain on them—but then denies it as well. That's more heinous.

I want to have some fun with numbers. I like numbers; I enjoy that. I've said earlier, we have a structural deficit in Ontario and it's masked by all of these one-time supplements. The government's revenue projections for 2017-18 are $4 billion higher than the Financial Accountability Officer's best-case scenario for Ontario. In the fall, he came out with a report and he said, "If all of our revenues magically hit this number here and our expenses magically are reduced to this number here, we're still going to have a deficit of $3.5 billion in 2017-18." That's what he told this Legislature. Yet somehow this government has propped up the revenues and made that deficit appear that it's going to disappear.

I trust the Financial Accountability Officer and his staff; I trust their numbers. They've got a book they put out that shows how they got to that. The best-case scenario says we cannot balance. If everything goes perfectly, we cannot balance. Those are his numbers. Yet the government's numbers—of course, when you just pluck numbers from thin air and you pluck in these revenue numbers that they've made up, that's the problem. They've used these one-time revenues.

A couple of other things the government did this year to artificially reduce their deficit: They removed $850 million from the contingency fund. That's always a great way to appear to balance. They applied—this is my favourite. Just think about it, Speaker. In the fall the government came out with a budget—remember, I said earlier that they dropped their deficit from an $8.5-billion forecast to $7.5 billion? Magically, only a couple of months later, they came in at $5.7 billion and patted themselves on the back.

What they failed to tell all of the people of Ontario is that they took a one-time—it's called a departure tax that Hydro had to pay. It's a grant or a payment in lieu of taxes. In the municipal world, the former mayor of Brockville and I would have called that PILT, payment in lieu of taxes.

0930

So they had to come up with a payment because they are no longer going to be a tax-free government-owned agency; they're going to be an independent corporation. They had to pay $2.6 billion. That's a one-time fee. They're never going to get that tomorrow, the next year or the year after that. They took $2.6 billion and dropped it into their revenue, into one-time revenue, which magically lowered their deficit forecast from $7.5 billion

down to $5.7 billion. It is unbelievable, Speaker, that they would do that, that they would artificially reduce their deficit. That didn't lower the spending. The deficit is still there; it's just artificially masked by this one-time payment. Of course, they also used, to get from $8.5 billion to $7.5 billion, the Hydro One sale.

The government says they're on track to balance, but here are some of the things, again, that they forgot to tell you they've included in the budget:

—Crossing their fingers and maybe their toes, they are planning on getting an extra $1.8 billion from the federal government. That's how they plan on balancing.

—Next year, they're going to carve out $1.9 billion more in personal income tax. I didn't hear the finance minister tell us, "By the way, I'm raising your taxes." He didn't tell us that in his budget, but it's $1.9 billion in new income taxes. It's in their budget. If you get into the back, past the aspirational stuff, and get into the real facts, you can see where it is.

—They're also forecasting $500 million in sales tax increases.

—They are forecasting $700 million in corporate income tax revenue and, of course, a further $500 million more than their original forecast from the cr—cap-and-trade. I almost said the same thing as the Premier. Caught myself there.

The debt is projected to be $308 billion this year. That's up from $296.1 billion. We are going to add $12 billion to our debt. Speaker, that means that we are the largest subnational debtor on the entire planet. That's what we are number one in.

The member from Parry Sound and I are both a couple of northern guys. We like to remember back to the good old days when we were number one. We were the number one mining jurisdiction in the world. Today, we've fallen to number 23. Well, they have replaced it by being the number one debtor in all the world. That's quite an accomplishment.

Debt is going to continue to grow. This budget projects that the debt will grow by $40 billion by 2018-19. Forty billion more dollars of debt will be added.

I could go on and on and on, but I think you get the spirit of what I'm speaking about, that this government doesn't want us here talking about this budget, and that's why they are time-allocating this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I have to say how disappointed I am at the government yet again utilizing time allocation.

There are not a lot of members that were here before the days of time allocation. I think there's maybe about five of us that were here at the time, before time allocation was introduced. But governments for over 100 years introduced budgets into this House, introduced all kinds of bills, and didn't need time allocation to move them through the process. The parties would sit down and they would say, "Okay, which bill is it that I want to have more time on, or more committee time?" It was a bit of a back-and-forth between the House leaders to decide which bills were going to get more committee time and which bills were going to get more time in the House. Those that were non-contentious got through the House pretty quickly.

If you'll notice this order paper that we currently have, there's a bunch of bills that we've all agreed on: the bill in regard to sexual assault, the bill in regard to stress in the workplace. There are all kinds of bills that we, quite frankly, were quite okay with and that we would have been able to limit—not limit, but not have as much debate, in order to have a bit of time in committee. Those bills that were more weighty, more substantive, that really had some issues that we needed to deal with, would have had more time in the House, such as this budget bill, possibly, and certainly when it comes to hearings in committee.

But, no, the government has decided that it knows best. It's going to time-allocate everything from now until the end of the session. It's pretty clear, since we've been back in the spring session, that the government has moved time allocation on almost every bill for the last couple of weeks. I think that is, quite frankly, a disservice to the people of Ontario.

This Legislature is about a couple of things. Aside from the powers that we have as legislators to do what it is that we do, this Legislature is here for members, who were elected by the people to come to this House and express the views of themselves and the people they represent on issues at hand. That's what debate is all about. But it's also for government ministers to listen to that debate, to say, "Okay. Well, you know, that's not a bad point. Maybe when the bill goes into committee, we'll think about having an amendment along that line."

But the big thing, and the most important thing, I think, that this House does is the committee process. That is to allow bills to go into committee, so that the public can have their shot at expressing themselves—either their favour or disfavour—as to any bill before this House. I would argue, up until the time before time allocation but even before the time of this government, the public had more of an opportunity to do so. Now the government has very much limited the amount of time we have at committee, using time allocation. I will argue that even the Conservatives, when they used time allocation in the time that they were in government, allowed more time in committee than this government does.

The process by which committee was structured, as far as who can present, and when you had to apply and how we picked our people who were going to depute, was much more organized under the NDP and the Conservatives utilizing time allocation than this government.

For example, last week, under time allocation, the government brought—the stress one. What is it called again?

Mr. John Vanthof: The PTSD bill.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, the PTSD bill. The government had the PTSD bill. The bill was voted on in the morning, and you had to have applied to stand before the committee to present by 5 o'clock that afternoon. Well, how in heck does that give the opportunity for the public to have any say about what goes on in that bill?

There's a bill where most people were in support, but quite frankly, people wanted to have amendments to the bill and wanted to explain the reasons why. But I think the secret in the way that the government wrote their time allocation motion—and that is related to this one—is that they really didn't want to hear what the public had to say in any real way, because they weren't about to amend the bill, based on what the public wanted.

So it was a bit of a sham, Speaker, that the government used time allocation in such a way that, first of all, it limited the ability for you to apply to get to committee to appear, and then really limited your ability to say something in committee that would have any meaningful outcome when it came to any amendments.

In this particular time allocation motion, the government says, "Oh, well, this thing will be voted on probably today," depending if the government takes any time off the clock, "or tomorrow." The government says, "Oh, well, look at this. You're going to have until next Wednesday"—or Thursday; I think it's Thursday—"next Thursday to be able to apply for application to appear before committee."

The only reason they put next Thursday is that next week is a constituency break, and the committee doesn't sit until the week after. So only by virtue of a constituency break does the public have an extra few days to apply to stand before committee and have their say on this budget, a budget that's going to increase costs to seniors when it comes to drug care; a budget by which we're shifting the way that we run student tuition to where, yes, we make it simple, and some people will benefit at the front end. But there are a lot of people who used to qualify for the tax credits who will no longer get them because they're no longer existent, and they will be losers.

There are all kinds of user fees, as we know. There's more privatization. There's more austerity in this budget than Tim Hudak had in his last election. Let me say that again: Kathleen Wynne in this budget has more austerity than Tim Hudak proposed in the last election, if you really read through this budget.

0940

The public should have the right to have their say. I've got to say, this is not a service to the people of Ontario. A government has to be able to listen to what the people have to say, and the best way to do that in our system of Parliament is to allow committees to sit and for people to be able to come before committee to present.

I propose that what the government should be doing is, first of all, not doing time allocation, but if they're going to time-allocate, at least give the public a week or two—I would argue a couple of weeks—to be able to apply to stand before committee. Because here's the thing: How many people are watching the television broadcast of this debate this morning? I would argue that the majority of Ontarians—I know you'll be surprised, Mr. Speaker—aren't watching this show. They're doing something else. They're probably watching the Republican primaries and the Democrat primaries on CNN or the Justin Trudeau show on the CBC.

Mr. Steve Clark: Well, I don't know about that.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, that's what they do.

In the end, the public is not watching, so they are not going to be aware that the budget's in committee, and they're certainly not going to be aware, the majority, that they have a right to be able to come before committee and be heard. So we're very much limiting the ability of the public to have their say by having time allocation written in the way that it is.

I would argue that if the government is going to time-allocate, there should be at least a couple of weeks so that the public is able to see the advertising, look at it and say, "What's that all about?"; that they're able to figure out how to contact the Clerk and get themselves on a list. It takes a couple of weeks for that to happen.

I know the government House leader might find this a bit of a surprise, but Ontario is bigger than Toronto. I love Toronto. Toronto is a great city, a world-class city. But you know what? There are other places across this province that are going to be affected by this budget, and will be affected by all kinds of other bills that this government puts through. This government has an opposition to travelling government bills on committee to other communities in the province like no other government I've ever seen before. When the New Democrats were in power, when David Peterson was in power and when Mike Harris was in power, we used to travel our bills—government bills—across the province in order to be able to hear what the public had to say so that it wasn't just the view of one group of people in one region of the province. It was travelled to various parts of the province for a reason.

That's the other thing that the government should be doing: allowing bills such as this sufficient time to be able to travel. It doesn't mean to say that it's a tactic to slow the bill down; it's a tactic to give the bill greater hearing so that the government can hear what the public has to say and make any amendments necessary. For example, the government says that they don't think they got the threshold right when it comes to the seniors' drug program. You'd probably learn more listening to people around this province about what the threshold should be if you did travel this bill.

In the little bit of time that I have left, I just have to say that the government should (a) allow more time for people to be able to apply to be on committee, to depute; and (b) allow enough time in committee, more days, so that the public has its say and has the ability to travel to those committees.

The other thing that really needs to be addressed as well is the issue of how we get selected to be on committee. The government says, by way of all their time allocation motions now, first come, first served. You know what? On the surface, that sounds like a great idea. But what happens if the government has already got a list of people who they want to apply? They say we've got three days of hearings that equals so many spots. Theoretically, the government, or an opposition party, could flood the submissions to the Clerk's office so that it's a

bit of a skewed presentation from the public. What we used to do, even under time allocation with other parties, is say that everybody who wants to apply applies and gets on the list. They have until a certain date and then the list is closed.

Then what happens, if there are more people who apply than there are spots in the committee to appear, is that each of the parties gets an equal number of people they get to pick. That allows for a good cross-section of people who apply to be before the committee, because the government may know that a particular witness is hostile to a particular initiative in the bill and they don't want that person to go in, and that's why they flood the application process; it's something that they can do. At the very least, what we should be able to do is have a system where you apply, and if we don't fill all the spots then everybody, from each of the caucuses, gets to pick an equal number of people. That way, we at least make who is presenting at the committee a little bit fairer.

Those are my comments. I know our other member from your House team wants to speak, so I'll let them do so. But Mr. Speaker, we will vote against this time allocation motion. It's a bad idea just generally, but if you read this time allocation motion, it is really about selling the public short on their ability to have their say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Kawartha Lakes–Brock—sorry, Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: That's pretty good, Mr. Speaker.

We're speaking now on the time allocation for the 2016 Ontario budget. We wanted more time to speak about the budget because, in the biggest phrase and emphasis I can put: The Liberals just made life harder for the people in Ontario.

We can't support the budget because we're uncompetitive, it's unsustainable and it's unaffordable for Ontarians. We've had 13 years of reckless spending. The government is spending about $1 billion every month just on paying off the debt, a debt which has doubled since the Liberal government was first elected in 2003. In fact, the Premier, Kathleen Wynne, has the worst fiscal record of any sitting Premier. What does that debt mean? It's $22,000 in debt for every person in Ontario. Even the House leader's new baby girl, that we're all congratulating him on, was just born into the world with a $22,000 debt already.

This is the third-largest budget item. It's $11 billion a year just to pay the interest on that debt. That could have been money that was spent to support our health care system, our aging population; money that could be going to long-term care, hospice and palliative care. You know what? Our seniors—which is a growing number, and the Liberal government has seen that demographic coming: the number of seniors that are in the province of Ontario—are very vulnerable. They need a hand up, but they're being left behind by this government.

We believed that this budget might be a chance for the government to show the people of Ontario that they were listening, but they didn't listen to any of the consultations that went on. In fact, they had this written before they even had consultations. Just the sale of the LCBO stores that was uncovered yesterday by our critic for finance, the member from Nipissing—who has done an excellent job—brought that out.

Interjection.

Ms. Laurie Scott: We'll just see what your answers are today, because you had no answers yesterday when we asked that question.

Interjections.

Ms. Laurie Scott: You have no sincere interest in listening to what the people of Ontario, especially the rural people of Ontario, have been telling you. It's an attack, no question, on the middle-class, for sure, and it's doing nothing for health care and crumbling schools or seniors.

The third-largest budget item in this government—you have health care, education, and then you have paying the interest on the debt of $11 billion. It's $1 billion a month. Ontario has the highest debt in Canada.

When the government always talks about its plans for infrastructure investments, having such a deficit and ballooning debt takes money away from what we actually need. We need to foster the right conditions in this province for our economy to succeed, but we are hampered by financial incompetence and mismanagement by this Liberal government. Our essential services are being stretched thin. Whenever I highlight the underfunded areas for our probation officers and parole officers, especially in light of what happened in Renfrew county and the triple homicides, or the fact that the budget contains no new funding to effectively combat human trafficking, no credible plan to manage the rising energy costs, or more funding to build long-term-care beds—how can we support such a budget? Where is the money for those things that we so desperately need? It's a blatant lack of compassion, and they're not looking out for the best interests of Ontarians.

0950

There are so many topics and so little time, Mr. Speaker. That's why they brought in time allocation. I'll try and get to some of what I've definitely heard in the riding of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

The government has no credible plan to address Ontario's unaffordable hydro rates and energy prices, which continue to rise and will hurt ratepayers right across the province. It continues to be the number one issue that my constituency office deals with.

The big picture is that Ontario has the highest energy rates in North America. Hydro rates have increased by more than $1,000 a year for the average family since 2003, and it's only going to continue to rise.

Every time this Liberal government makes a decision for political reasons, Ontario families pay. What's worse is that this government seems to be perfectly happy to continue with the sale of Hydro One, without any assurances that the sale will not result in even more hydro increases.

What were the polls? Over 80% of the people didn't want Hydro One to be sold. Did the government listen? No. It's a one-time sale, to try to balance their books. It's

a desperate move by the Liberal government. The people of Ontario were opposed to it. Municipal councils—all my municipal councils—were against the sale and wrote to the government on that, but they didn't listen.

Hydro One is the tipping point for people who are on fixed income or in marginal categories in my riding. They have put them into poverty. I have said time and time again in this Legislature that I have more people in poverty than I did 13 years ago, when this government took power. It's real. They tell me these stories. They're being pushed out of their homes, if they had homes to stay in. They are trying to pay their hydro. But the cycle goes that you get them on a payment plan, but in reality, it's so large that they eventually can't make the payment plan. They don't pay the property taxes. They go to the food banks.

In Haliburton county, at the chamber of commerce, there were three awards won by Fuel for Warmth, which is a fuel bank. That's how desperate people are. There are actually fuel banks, because they can't afford to heat their homes and feed themselves. That is a sign of the times.

I see more people hitchhiking on the side of the roads in my area, because they can't afford the cars, the insurance, the hydro bills. The cost of everything is going up, and they can't afford it. It is tragic to see.

We asked the government to bring forward a plan that's affordable. Even if they just stopped signing those unaffordable, intrusive and, in my case, subsidized industrial wind turbines that are going up and being forced down the throats of all of us in rural Ontario—and the people and the councils that have fought against this government, to stop industrial wind turbines, are appealing. They're raising money to appeal this ridiculous plan.

The industrial wind turbines in my area are predominantly in the Oak Ridges moraine, a supposedly protected environmental jewel in the province of Ontario. There is no reason that industrial wind turbines should be erected there. It's a failed government policy. They overrode the municipal councils. They overrode the communities—bullying at its finest, actually. It's just unacceptable.

I commend them for fighting these industrial wind turbines. For years, this fight has gone on. We hope that they're never erected. I hope the government is listening and looking logically at the arguments against those industrial wind turbines there.

As I talk about hydro and energy, it's important to acknowledge the importance of climate change. It's real; it's man-made. We need to take action. It's a serious challenge that requires a credible plan.

The Liberal government's plan of cap-and-trade is not the right way to go. It will start in January of next year. By 2017 and 2018, the revenue collected will be a staggering $1.9 billion. Look, even your former finance minister Greg Sorbara said it was a money grab and there's no proof in the world that cap-and-trade would decrease emissions. So why don't you listen to Greg Sorbara, if you won't listen to me?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Because he's wrong.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Is that why he got out of your party? He didn't agree with you anymore?

Anyway, the cap-and-trade program is supposed to lower Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions, but the government really hasn't outlined how the revenue will reduce emissions. They said the funds will go toward innovation, transit and clean technology, but we all know that it's going to go to a Liberal slush fund. Come on. There's no accountability—

Interjections.

Ms. Laurie Scott: No, no. There's no accountability.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): First of all, I want to deal with the importance of—in debate, we address the Speaker, through the Speaker, so that we don't get antagonism going across the floor.

Secondly, this is a time-allocated bill, which, to me, would imply it's an important bill. Because it's an important bill, I would ask that members in this Legislature pay attention to debate and show respect so that each side has the opportunity to voice their opinion. So I would ask that we maintain order in this House, listen carefully to the speaker, and I will ask all speakers to address through the Chair. Thank you very much.

I would ask that the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock continue with debate.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a compliment when you get the other side so riled up that the Speaker has to intercede. So thank you very much for that.

You have the price of gasoline that is—the Premier said that it's going up 4.3 cents a litre with the cap-and-trade. The price of natural gas is going up a miniscule amount, they say. But in reality, the private sector analysts have actually crunched the numbers and, in the long-term, they say that gas will go up, on average, about $400 a year for the average family and home heating will be going up an average of $475 a year.

So how are senior citizen on fixed incomes—they're already freezing to death in the middle of the day because they're scared to turn the heat on, and that is reality, or they're going to some place in a mall that has heat so they can walk around and save money by not turning the heat on. That is the problem. And the energy retrofits in this budget that the government has outlined only apply to natural gas. Of course, that's going up too.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: No, it doesn't.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Okay. Well, I hope that the—

Mr. Steve Clark: You do have time left.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Yes. I hope there's some response, because what have they got against people in rural Ontario that can't get natural gas? We only have oil and propane in rural Ontario. We'd like natural gas, but we don't have natural gas.

The agricultural community has asked for dollars for more infrastructure for natural gas, because guess what? They can't pay all the bills that it costs for electricity in the province of Ontario either. They've asked for that infrastructure; that was ignored in this budget. In fact, the

agriculture budget was decreased by $28 million, and they gave no farm industrial rate for electricity at all.

I have an email from one of my constituents that says:

"As seniors, the recent Liberal government budget hurts us in so many ways ... higher cost for gas, more cost for home heat, more cost to drive, more cost for electricity, more cost for health care and drug costs ... the only thing I'm able to do is eat less and hope I don't need more health care.

"The changes really hurt us. And we already have difficulties dealing with higher food costs and mandatory home expense increases!

"What can we do to stop this madness?" this lady said. Right on.

I want to talk a bit about health care. I don't have much time left. If the government hadn't mismanaged the province's finances and taken away funding from essential services, our hospitals wouldn't be in such dire straits. So the picture is, for the last four years, this government has frozen hospital budgets, which is actually a cut because their costs have gone up. So it's been a cut, and they're asking them to go into their fifth year. They've put a 1%, maybe, increase in this budget—not even close to meeting the demands that the hospitals have because of, mainly, our aging senior population. But, after four years, how much more can you cut? Let's be real.

One of my hospitals, Ross Memorial Hospital, is facing basically a $3-million cut. They are doing an incredible job at managing the decrease in funding that this government has put them on, going into their fourth year. I know the member from Northumberland is in the same situation. Our mid-sized hospitals have a funding formula that just doesn't work. We have gone to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to write a letter to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care about this glaring, striking, detrimental problem with mid-size hospital funding.

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The hospital in Lindsay has done what they could with attrition, with trying to move services in the most cost-effective way. The hospital needs assistance. Is it getting some? We don't know for sure because, again, we don't know the details, but it's not going to be enough. So I say to you, look at the mid-size hospital funding formula especially.

I want to talk about long-term care and I want to talk about my LHIN. I have the Central East LHIN; the member from Northumberland is also in that LHIN. We have the largest demand and the lowest capacity in the LHIN; I believe I'm saying that right. We have that not only for long-term-care beds, but we have one of the highest needs for mental health assistance programs and facilities in Ontario. That's an Ontario comparison. The Central East Community Care Access Centre has given me the number of individuals waiting for long-term care in the Central East LHIN; it is 8,592.

You cannot address the long-term-care problem that we have in the province of Ontario without building new beds. The Central East LHIN goes from Scarborough, Haliburton county—it's massive, to start with. But I want to highlight that it's the lowest number of beds available, and the highest number of those in need are mental health and addictions; it's the second-highest number of active mental health cases in the province of Ontario. Our CCACs now are going to be rolled into the LHINs. Whichever title you want to put on it, it is not sustainable. The government has to address the high-need demand in our areas.

They've got the doctors enraged, and you can bet your bottom dollar doctors are going to leave the province. You can't get hip replacements in January, February and March for seniors because they've already gone through their budget, because they haven't addressed the growing seniors population. They are laying off nurses. Pick a hospital, any hospital; they are laying off nurses.

The government has been irresponsible in managing the finances of the province of Ontario, and the people in Ontario are suffering. That's why I'm voting against this budget.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, although I'm disappointed that I'm contributing it towards a time allocation debate, because I know myself and other members in this House really wanted to critique, offer suggestions and point out what is really in this budget. What we hear from the government side is all the great things that are in that budget. We have other opinions, and we need that time to debate this budget in order to communicate those opinions. But when you put a time allocation motion forward, that means each party has 40 minutes to debate this.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I want more.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, we're asking for more time. This is probably—I mean, every bill that goes through this House is extremely important and affects people's lives, but when it's a budget motion, it's far and wide and reaching. This is why a time allocation motion, especially in these circumstances, really defeats the purpose of a fulsome, productive, critiquing exchange of ideas. That's what the debate should be about.

If you look at the title we have, Jobs for Today and Tomorrow, it's tongue-in-cheek in a lot of ways. We've had three days of debate, and on our side, on the NDP side, we have had three speakers. One of those speakers is our finance critic. The finance critic, or any critic in the House, once a bill is presented, takes an hour lead of the time. So, Speaker, there have not been many contributions that we've been allowed to make.

Why I feel passionately about this specific time allocation motion that shouldn't be in front of this House when it comes to this budget is because we haven't had an opportunity to articulate the needs of our constituents. We haven't had an opportunity to stress how seniors are going to be adversely affected when they have to pay more for the prescriptions deductible.

Speaker, I had seniors come into my office before this budget, talking about how hard it is to make that co-payment because of their income levels. I looked up some research, I'd say, about a year and a half ago on how that income level was not changed for 20 years. Then we get this budget piece for drug prescriptions, and it's making it harder, not easier, for seniors to survive.

The member from the Conservative Party talked about the renovation tax credit that's in this budget. It's very vague. We believe that it's only for people with natural gas. That's what comes across in that budget. Read the budget book. That's what it says; that's what the message is.

On the other side, the Liberal Party, the Treasurer, the minister for treasury, she said, "No, that's not right. It's for all types of energy." She has left the House—

Ms. Laurie Scott: She's going to find out.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: She's going to check it out. She's not even quite sure—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd just like to remind the member that we cannot make reference to any members who are not present in the House. Okay? Thank you very much.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, that wasn't to identify that she's not here. That was to say that she's actually going to check, so that we can be informed—oh.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I believe the point has been made. I'll ask that you would continue along with your debate, but do not refer, whether it be intentional or unintentional, to anyone who may not be here in the Legislature. Thank you very much.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay. The point is, there needs to be clarification on this home renovation tax credit. People believe it's only for natural gas. This is why it's so wrong to time-allocate things. We are now pointing that out, and this is the first time that we have heard it's not just for natural gas. I think most members here are surprised.

Speaker, when I became an MPP, one of the things that I really valued was actually standing up in this Legislature and bringing the thoughts, opinions, experiences and life examples of how legislation affects the people in London–Fanshawe. This time allocation doesn't allow for us to express this in a wholesome way.

When we're elected as members, we have a duty to speak to each of our constituents and to bring their voices to this Legislature, so that legislation can actually respond to their needs, so that we can let this government know what amendments are required.

I'll give you an example, Speaker. Here's another miscommunication, I think, in a lot of ways, when it came to legislation.

When I first got elected—it was a minority government—there was the home renovation tax credit for seniors who wanted to remain in their homes. If you had a renovation, like in a bathroom which was going to be accessible—ramps, all kinds of accessible devices that you might need, or construction you might need to do in your home—they were going to give you a tax credit. If you spent roughly $10,000, you'd get a $1,400 tax credit. We sat in this House and we explained that this legislation, though it had a purpose, was not going to be effective and actually reach the market that this government was trying to capture, which would be a tax credit for seniors, to remain in their home. What has happened because of that legislation? That has been repealed. In the government's own words, "There wasn't enough uptake."

Now we're talking about seniors and a drug prescription costs increase. We're letting you know this is the wrong decision. Seniors will not be filling their prescriptions. Seniors take an average of about eight medications a year. If you're a senior who makes $19,500, and you've got to pay an extra $70, and an extra co-payment fee, are you going to put that $70 out? Can you afford to put that $70 out?

Speaker, seniors are going to go without medication. Their health is going to deteriorate. Their health is deteriorating under the fact that this government is increasing the cost of the prescription drugs deductible by $70.

1010

This is a reality, Speaker. In the last election, in 2014, when I was knocking on doors, I had a home care worker tell me that when she goes out to see her clients in their homes—seniors specifically—do you know what their diet consisted of? She was very worried. Their diet consisted of tea with toast and marmalade. That's what they had for dinner.

This is a reality that seniors are facing. They are struggling financially. They can't afford this government's $70 increase on prescription drugs. They can't afford higher hydro rates.

The other part of that is, when they're looking to downsize from their home, if they have to for financial reasons or perhaps health reasons—they can't maintain the outside of their home—there is no affordable housing. There are not a lot of affordable apartments for seniors. I hear that a lot.

The other part of this budget consultation that happened—yes, they travelled the budget, Speaker, but this budget was written before we had an opportunity to actually consult with constituents and the committee. Our finance critic said that, and I believe her. I believe there is that speculation that this budget was written before consultations started. That's a sad message that follows this government, that decisions are already made before consultation is put out there.

The Robarts school and the Amethyst Demonstration School, in my riding: The government is doing consultations. The parents are contacting me, Speaker—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. I just again want to remind our members that there is a debate going on. I'm not discrediting the fact that you may have an important message or conversation going on, but that has a better place—perhaps not here at the time—and to have respect for the member. Again, I'd like to remind everyone.

I turn it back to the member for London–Fanshawe to continue with debate. Thank you.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thank you, Speaker. I know my colleagues here; there was no intention of disrupting my debate. I think they just get really passionate and talk about issues. They're probably talking about this home tax credit for natural gas—

Ms. Laurie Scott: We were.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —and how we need to make sure we communicate that to the public.

Mr. Steve Clark: We were. That's what we were talking about.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I knew that. But I have to remember what I was going to discuss. Yes, actually, I do remember: the very important issue of the Robarts and Amethyst schools.

This government is out consulting with the schools. I have heard that they actually are sending letters to parents in the school to consult with, but not everybody is having that opportunity. The parents that have actually applied to Robarts and Amethyst for the coming session, for the coming school year, are not invited to speak. What has happened is, this government has suspended all new applications to the school, so these parents aren't actually able to communicate the needs of their kids and how important it is that that school remains open. The other thing the government did was cap enrolment at 42 students. It has the capacity for 138 students.

Parents are telling me that they think this government's decision has already been cast in stone. When the public feels that their voice isn't heard—when this government is supposed to do their job and consult—that is a real problem.

Time allocation on this budget bill is the wrong thing to do. There are mixed messages in this budget. People don't have a clear understanding of what it will do for them. What they do understand is that things are going up, and they can't afford to pay for them. That's what they are worried about.

I know I have limited time left to wrap up. I hope that this government will pay attention. I know we keep telling this government that there are some things that are fundamentally wrong that they need to correct. Time allocation on a budget bill is a fundamental thing they need to listen to and correct. If nothing else, what harm does it do to continue this debate? It's actually a good thing for democracy. It's actually a healthy thing. It promotes confidence outside of this House and inside our ridings.

Speaker, I just want to thank you for the opportunity to debate on this issue. I'm going to keep going until you let me know that the House is ready to adjourn. So I'm just going to wrap up—oh, I'll let you do your job, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I gave you a chance to wrap up a moment ago. Then when you said, "I'd like another opportunity to wrap up," I figured that would be my cue to state that it's now 10:15.

Debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: I see a friend of mine, Kim Sytsma, who is a local beef farmer in the Athens area. I just want to welcome Kim to Queen's Park.

Mr. John Vanthof: I also see an old friend of mine, Bob Gordanier. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Speaker, I have a few introductions. I hope you'll indulge me.

First we have, from the city of Pickering, Mayor David Ryan and regional councillors Kevin Ashe and David Pickles. They're here to pay tribute to Kevin's late father, George Lyle Ashe, the former mayor of Pickering, MPP for Durham West, and minister in the Bill Davis and Frank Miller cabinets.

Secondly, I'd like to welcome the grade 5 students from St. Brendan Catholic School. They're visiting the Legislature today with their teachers to learn about the Ontario Legislature.

Next, I'd like to welcome Melissa Kim who is in the gallery today. She's my mentee from the CivicAction DiverseCity Fellows program. It's particularly fitting Kim is able to join us here for International Women's Day.

Last, but not least, we have our Roundtable on Violence Against Women co-chairs. I'd like to welcome Farrah Khan and Sly Castaldi. Thank you for being here in the Legislature.

Mr. Robert Bailey: In the west members' gallery, I have constituents from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex: Malcolm McLean, Juel Howse, Catherine McLean, Morgan Tamminga and Claire Tamminga. They're here to see their granddaughter and sister Micah Tamminga, who is the page captain today.

It also happens to be Micah's 13th birthday today. Happy birthday, from the Legislature to Micah.

Mr. Paul Miller: I'd like to introduce Christina Demeter. She's an intern in my office, from Ryerson, sitting in the west gallery.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to welcome the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, OCUFA, who are here today for their lobby day. Please join me in welcoming them.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming Bob Gordanier. He's the past president of the Beef Farmers of Ontario, but most importantly, a proud resident of Dufferin–Caledon.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I met earlier today with some representatives from OCUFA. John Wilson is here from Western University and Ben Muller from King's University College. Andrea Calver is up here—she's on the staff—and my buddy Brian Brown from the University of Windsor. They have a reception later. They're inviting everybody to join them. Thank you and welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I would like to welcome Dylan Atack and his dad Ritch Atack to the Legislature today. Dylan is a proud Hamilton resident and a number one Hamilton Ticats booster.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted that Smokey Thomas is with us today, the president of OPSEU. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'd like to welcome Smokey Thomas from OPSEU and Clarke Eaton as well. They're in the members' gallery.

Hon. Jeff Leal: For one last time, in the members' east gallery today, we have Bob Gordanier, the past president of the Beef Farmers of Ontario; director Kim Sytsma; and the manager of policies and issues, Richard Horne. We welcome them here today.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I understand that we have five guests from Durham region sitting in the gallery today: Rosemary Theriault, her husband Gerry Theriault, Ann Clement, Shirley Keelor and Bonnie Lee Davidson. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It is a great pleasure to welcome Connie de Souza, the mother of page captain Laura de Souza.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Mr. Speaker, if you'll indulge me, I have a few guests to introduce today. I want to introduce guests visiting us from Portugal on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Real Canadian Portuguese Historical Museum and the unveiling of a replica of the caravela portuguesa: Bruno Gonçalves Neves, first tenant, chief of investigation, at the marine museum of Portugal; Rui Bela, a filmmaker from Portugal; and José Rocha, from the Real Canadian Portuguese Historical Museum.

Bem-vindos to Queen's Park.

Also, I wanted to introduce a very, very special guest to Queen's Park today: my favourite 10-year-old niece, Jessica.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I had the pleasure this morning of meeting with the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, and I'd like to introduce Rob Kristofferson from Wilfrid Laurier University, Ed Carter from the University of Guelph, and Sally Gunz from the University of Waterloo. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^me^ France Gélinas: I also have some guests who came in from up north. This is William Osei from Algoma University; Gautam Das from Lakehead University; Brian Ross from NOSM, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine; Rhiannon Don from Nipissing University; as well as Mark Rosenfeld, executive director of OCUFA. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I, too, wish to welcome Smokey Thomas and Clarke Eaton who are here representing OPSEU.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to welcome Smokey Thomas.

This morning we have in the Speaker's gallery some friends of mine who are guests for lunch: Mr. Ron Sage, Mr. Dave Piper and Mr. Gord Taylor. Welcome to Queen's Park. Thank you for being here with us.

I'm also sure that the members are going to be pleased to join me in welcoming the family and friends of the late George Lyle Ashe, the MPP for Durham West during the 31st, 32nd and 33rd Parliaments, who are seated in the Speaker's gallery: his sons Steven and Kevin; Kevin's wife, Karen; daughter Cheryl Hinzel and husband Erwin; grandchildren Anika, Eric, Matt, Krista, and Andrea and her husband Kevin; the mayor of Pickering, Dave Ryan; and Councillor Dave Pickles.

Also in the Speaker's gallery: Mr. David Warner, the Speaker in the 35th Parliament; Mr. Steve Gilchrist, MPP for Scarborough East during the 36th and 37th Parliaments, and also president of the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians; and Mr. Douglas Moffatt, MPP during the 30th Parliament for Durham East. Welcome to our Legislature.

Applause.

GEORGE ASHE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I call upon the government House leader for a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to pay tribute to George Lyle Ashe, former member for Durham West, with a representative from each caucus speaking for up to five minutes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to pay tribute to George Lyle Ashe, former member of Durham West. Do we agree? Agreed.

The member from Oshawa.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you, Speaker. It is always an honour to stand in this proud Legislature, and today it is my honour to stand to share on behalf of the family and friends joining us here today, and to pay tribute to George Lyle Ashe.

I am pleased to welcome George's family today. George and his wife Margo raised four children, so welcome to his son Steve, daughter Cheryl and husband Erwin, and son Kevin and his spouse Karen. His son Brian couldn't be here today, but he's watching on the Internet from North Carolina. We also welcome granddaughter Andrea, her husband Kevin and their daughter, great-granddaughter Anika. Welcome to grandsons Eric and Matt, and granddaughter-in-law Krista.

I am also pleased to recognize and welcome Councillor David Pickles and Pickering's Mayor Dave Ryan to Queen's Park.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak about a former member of this Legislature who dedicated his career to his community and to public service. George Ashe started his journey in Ottawa and served in the early 1960s as alderman for Nepean township. When he moved with his family to Pickering, he continued on his journey of service and was elected deputy reeve of Pickering.

Four years after that, George Ashe became the very first mayor of Pickering, when we went to regional government. It is interesting that there have only been three other Pickering mayors, and we are glad, as I mentioned, to have Mayor Ryan join us today.

George served as mayor until he was elected to this Legislature for the riding of Durham West in 1977. Back

then, Durham West would have encompassed Pickering, Ajax and Whitby, but it was at a time when Durham region was just starting to grow and take shape.

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He was a proud Conservative and was appointed in 1981 to Bill Davis's cabinet as Minister of Revenue. He later served as Minister of Government Services. He served as Minister of Energy and Chair of the Management Board in Frank Miller's cabinet.

George Ashe was not a politician who sought the limelight. He was hard-working and was a quiet type of guy. He didn't hold the flashy cabinet portfolios, but he committed himself to them, recognizing how important they were to the efficient running of government.

George served as a member of a minority, then majority government and also as an opposition member. I understand that he preferred being on the government benches. George served the people of Durham West here in this Legislature until 1987, but his public service didn't stop there. George served as a Catholic school trustee in Clarington and did that for a term.

George was a resident of Durham for almost 50 years and must have seen so much change, grow and develop in that time. He clearly also saw opportunities to be a part of that development through the various avenues of service he pursued.

Later in George's life, he battled Parkinson's disease, but even in that lengthy struggle he continued to contribute to the broader community. He and his wife, Margo, and daughter, Cheryl, became significant fundraisers for Parkinson research and participated annually in the Parkinson SuperWalk.

George Ashe didn't only leave behind a lifetime of service and commitment; he evidently has left a clear legacy of work ethic and service. As many in public service know, it can be a tremendous sacrifice being away from home and family life. George's commitment to his community was something that his children grew up with. He was always involved, and whether he meant to or not, he led by example. We all learn from our parents. Sometimes we learn what to do and sometimes we learn what not to do. But it is a testament to George's commitment and convictions that he was not only a model for others to follow, he was a model that others have followed.

I was pleased to welcome George's family earlier, but I would like to specifically point out that George's son Steven is here, and we appreciate his service and involvement at the Ontario Regiment in Oshawa. Steve is a retired corporal with the Ontario Regiment reserves. Also, George's son Kevin Ashe has chosen to serve and is a Pickering city and regional councillor, and was a trustee before that. I will say that perhaps the apples didn't fall far from the tree.

Something pretty interesting, actually, is that back in 1974, George was the very first chairman of the finance committee at the new region, and Kevin serves on that same committee at the region now.

George Ashe was a proud Conservative, an avid Blue Jays fan and a remarkable husband, brother, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, or "Grumpy." He leaves a lifetime and a legacy of public and community service. Durham region is a dynamic and wonderful region, and as it grows and strengthens, it does so on a community framework and foundation made stronger by George Ashe and his lifelong dedication to public service.

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

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm delighted to speak this morning in memory of George Ashe, who was elected on the same day as I was to the Legislature, and that is June 9, 1977, so we were together. This happens with all of us who are elected at the same time: It's the class of that particular year, and so you have special memories of those people who joined the Legislature on the same date that you did.

George also recognized something very important. Although it's not a necessity, there's a great advantage to having served in municipal government before advanceing—if you can say "advancing," because some people say municipal government is more important—before changing and coming to the provincial level of government. George recognized that. You can tell by his early days in politics, his service to his community and the separate school board and as a municipal councillor. He always had the community at heart. That's exceedingly important.

I'm going to quote, in a couple of minutes, some of George's own words, because they're rather revealing. There was a great interview that took place with George where, in his words, he talks about his time in the Legislature. Things keep coming through my mind. He was not a person who suffered fools easily, and I remember—I'm not saying the person is a fool; please don't get me wrong—that one of his own members one day mentioned something about the nuclear industry, which of course is very important to George's part of the province, and I could hear him addressing the person at that particular time. I was glad Hansard didn't pick it up; it would have been unparliamentary language. But he did make certain reference to another member of his own party who had said something that didn't fit with his constituency. It goes back to the theme that his constituency was most important to him. He, of course, had a private sector career in the insurance industry, so he met a lot of people through that and was involved in community organizations.

The portfolios he served in have been mentioned. They're significant portfolios. It's quite right to say that they're not the glamorous or high-profile portfolios, but it's exceedingly important in government to have those portfolios and to have a competent person there. You can say that George always knew where the bottom line was, and he was very careful about that, both at the municipal level and at the provincial level of government.

They asked him, "Politicians: Why do they do it?" An interesting answer: "One has to be a bit of a masochist.

"Of course, there's that initial appeal of wanting to do something either because you feel you have something to

contribute or you're not happy with the way someone else is doing it. You know, it's easy to be critical. But it's quite another thing to say I can do better and actually do something about it.

"The masochism, though, I think that comes into it because so often you're in a 'no-win' situation. If you do a good job there's often not much in the way of gratitude or thank-yous. But if you're perceived to have done wrong, you take a lot of flak for it. You become a problem solver for your constituents but you weigh all these things and they're simply offset by the love of the job, the sense of involvement and the challenge of being here."

I thought he really captured why he came to the Legislature.

He talked about majority government. Remember, there had been a minority government from 1977 to 1981, and they said, "Okay, we're now coming into majority government." "Certainly, too, I think we all have to avoid the impression that we're the big 'fat cat,' unconcerned majority and that we're not going to listen to anyone. We're going to have to bend over backwards to make sure that impression's not there." So he recognized in the transition how important it was to be able to respond to the Legislature as a whole.

When he talks about constituency versus ministry—and this is exceedingly important, because it's a difficult decision when you have a ministry. "My constituency work comes first, it's as simple as that. I've conveyed this philosophy to my staff both here and in my riding and they know how strongly I feel about this. Obviously, if I don't satisfy to some appreciable degree, the needs, expectations and desires of electorate of Durham West, I won't be here later on.... That's a reality no politician should ever forget."

George never did forget that. He was an excellent constituency person—a person I grew to find very interesting and a likable person to deal with. He was a solid Conservative, I assure you of that, a solid Progressive Conservative, a partisan, as all of us are in the House, but he was more interested in getting things done and being practical.

The last thing I want to say to Kevin and the audience is that there was one headline that says—I've got to read this to you: "Liberals Fire Minister's Son as Chauffeur." Now, that wasn't really the case, of course, and Kevin took it, as he always does, with the greatest of laughter and a good sense of humour. But when there's a transition of government, he recognized—and he had been an excellent person travelling with ministers he had served with. You know that those people tend to be rather close. They hear the conversations going on. By the way, there were no telephones in the car in the early days, so there was not those kinds of conversations, but you certainly had an insight. I think Kevin recognized that when the government changed hands, they would probably be looking for somebody else, but that didn't keep him down. It's in the tradition. The family has followed the tradition of George Ashe. Kevin, who I know very well out of the members of the family, knew that and has remained, in fact, a friend of all of ours.

There's a certain print of Queen's Park that was in George's office. Tracy MacCharles, the present member now, wanted to note—and I think it's most appropriate—that that was given to her by Kevin Ashe and it is now in her constituency office. George may no longer be with us, but evidence of his service at Queen's Park is here. We thank his family for sharing him with us.

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

Mr. Lorne Coe: It's my privilege and honour to acknowledge the life of George Ashe, the member of provincial Parliament for Durham West. I'm pleased to recognize many members of George's family and some friends who have joined us in the gallery: Steven, his son; Cheryl Hinzel and Erwin Hinzel; my good friend Kevin Ashe, with whom I served on regional council, and his partner, Karen O'Brien; Andrea Arkell and Kevin Arkell; Anika Arkell; Eric Hinzel and Matt Hinzel; Krista Barnsley; His Worship Mayor Dave Ryan from the city of Pickering; my colleague from regional council David Pickles; and George's son Brian is watching from his home in North Carolina. I'd also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge Doug Moffatt, who was a former member of Parliament here as well.

As Kevin has told me, his father was not an ostentatious man. He was very conservative in nature, a man of dedication and purpose, an extremely hard worker, as my colleague indicated earlier in her comments, whose roles in the Legislature reflected the character of the man. George was always very comfortable as he participated in the business of the Legislature, but he never felt it necessary to seek the limelight.

I read an interview George gave in 1981 after his appointment as the Minister of Revenue. He was so proud of that appointment because he had served as a parliamentary assistant for three previous ministers. It really paralleled what Kevin had told me about his dad. George said that an effective politician "is a good listener, an excellent listener, that's the main thing." Isn't that true? "And then of prime importance too, the best politicians must never be afraid to admit they don't know everything. They must tell the person this and get out there and find the right answers."

George Ashe was a very decent man and never tried to be something that he wasn't. He played to his strengths. He said, "I've always been known as a hard worker. I put in a lot of time and effort and I think this has been well recognized." And it was, in his riding and other parts of Durham region. "As well, I've always tried to be available and to assist my associates wherever and whenever possible...."

Predeceased by his wife, Margo, who was a key partner in what George accomplished, George passed away peacefully at the Village of Taunton Mills in Whitby on August 3, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, many of us here could learn a great deal from the character of George Ashe. He believed in help-

ing people who could not help themselves or who have suffered misfortune. He especially believed in a hand up for those who need it but only lacked an opportunity, all part of his deep humanity and decency. He gave his all to serve his riding and the province that he loved.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to thank all the members for their kind and heartfelt comments to the family.

To the family: As is the tradition, we will have copies of Hansard and a DVD of the tributes delivered to the family with our love and affection. Thank you for the gift of your father.

ORAL QUESTIONS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, I asked a serious public policy question and the environment minister responded by answering and pulling a number out of thin air, out of his hat. The number wasn't real. The number that is real is $1.9 billion. That's the size of the next Liberal slush fund—a fund collected under the guise of fighting climate change. It is disheartening that you would make families and businesses pay so much more for this government's pet projects.

Mr. Speaker, I didn't get an answer yesterday. Will the Premier of Ontario—will this government—commit to giving every single cent collected back to the families of Ontario, yes or no?

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. While the clock is stopped, I'm going to remind all members that I'm the Chair.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: First, I want to begin by wishing everyone a very happy International Women's Day.

I want to say to the Leader of the Opposition that I think it's terrific that he has now decided that he supports carbon pricing. I think that's a very good thing. It speaks to the realization across the country and, in fact, around the globe that climate change is not a distant threat; climate change is something that we have to deal with right now.

One of the things we have to do is invest in the technologies and we have to invest in the community to make sure that we reduce our carbon footprint. All the money that comes in through the cap-and-trade system will be reinvested in green projects in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, create jobs, grow the economy and help our economy to be that cutting edge—

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock. Be seated, please. First and foremost, I'm just going to give some advice. The ovation wars that are going on, if they would stop, we'd be able to get to questions.

Number two, it's hard for me to decide on who's heckling who when members of the government side are—the Premier's giving the answer and I'm hearing heckling from that side, and also heckling on this side that basically just wants to repeat names over and over again. Let's just calm it down. That's your last time and then I'll move into individuals and warnings if I have to.

Leader?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: I didn't get an answer on whether it would simply be another Liberal slush fund. Let me say this: Ontario's former Environmental Commissioner, Gord Miller, said, "Other provinces did the right thing because the provinces also lowered income taxes at the same time." Mr. Miller said, "It's a matter of being fair with people and making it very visible."

He was referring to a revenue-neutral model, with full independent oversight. Why won't this government do the right thing? Why won't this government commit to an open, transparent and visible revenue-neutral model? Will you do that?

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

Hon. Glen R. Murray: As the Premier pointed out—

Interjection.

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

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: As the Premier pointed out, we're very glad in this House that the other side has seen the light and that the Leader of the Opposition has flip-flopped to a more reasonable position on this. Now the PC leader says he agrees that climate change is a major threat—that was Mr. Brown on August 27, 2015. But when he ran for the leadership, he said that he would not bring his plan forward, a cap-and-trade system, for a carbon tax—

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

Final supplementary.

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Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: I would appreciate a direct answer, rather than government spin, diversion and misdirection.

A 2015 Financial Post article said it was very clear that the revenue-neutral model worked. Revenue neutrality is key. Don't take my word for it. People from all around Ontario have been speaking out.

Let me share with you a quote from a notable Ontarian: "I have to be a little bit sceptical about the whole scheme, other than it's going to be a lot of new money into government." Who said that? Former finance minister Greg Sorbara.

Mr. Speaker, if Greg Sorbara sees this is a cash grab, if Greg Sorbara sees this as another tool for the government to simply take more from Ontario families, will the Premier admit to the province of Ontario that this is

nothing more than a cash grab that the Liberal Party is doing, once again, on the backs of Ontarians?

Interjections.

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

Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You won't know when I'm going to pounce.

Minister.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Then again, the PC leader said that there has to be a price on carbon on March 10, 2016. But then again, he ran against the federal plan to cut pollution by putting a price on carbon. Again, another flip-flop.

Then the PC leader said there was practically universal support in his caucus for carbon pricing, Mr. Speaker, flipping again. But again, just last week, my critic said, "Will you heed the advice of the PC Party of Ontario and commit to not implementing a carbon tax?"

Now, the PC leader said that the majority of his members agree on this, just on March 7. But then, the poor president of his party called the carbon pricing "the Liberal vision of Canada...a Liberal carbon tax on everything" in November.

Mr. Speaker, this member has taken so many positions daily on this, from week to week, that we never know what his position's going to be—

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

Interjections.

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

Be seated, please. Be seated, please.

Start the clock. New question.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, a government that can't defend their own plan chooses to attack. Since I can't get an answer on revenue neutrality, my question—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Who is the question for?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier.

Since I can't get an answer on revenue neutrality or whether this is simply another Liberal slush fund, let's talk about health care. This budget promised that there would be support for health care. But what we're seeing is the opposite: more cuts, cuts and cuts.

Toronto General and Toronto Western had to cut 51 RN positions; 59 were cut at Mount Sinai; 61 RN positions were lost at St. Joseph's Health Care Centre in Hamilton. When will this stop? I thought we heard a commitment to health care in this budget. Instead, it's more cuts on nurses. When will the government stop cutting nurses in this province?

Interjections.

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

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the Leader of the Opposition will know if he looks closely at the budget, spending for health care will increase by a billion dollars, as a result of this budget. We are very aware, Mr. Speaker, of the importance of continuing to invest in health care, specifically on hospitals. We're increasing funding to hospitals by $345 million.

So the reality is that funding for health care continues to go up, Mr. Speaker. Additional funding for home and community care: $75 million in community-based hospice and palliative care; $85 million for community health services. So across the sectors within health care, Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to invest. We are continuing to increase budgets, and that means more personnel, more services for people in the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: This past week in Ottawa, I heard story after story about the impact of the government's cuts to physician services. Two graduating dermatology residents were forced to relocate. One family doctor was forced to fire two staff, impacting 2,500 patients. Four family doctors had to close their offices one day a week, impacting 5,000 patients. Thirteen family doctors had to limit their flu shot clinics, which impacted 17,000 patients. Those were just a few stories that I heard in Ottawa this weekend.

There is nothing in this budget that is going to help family doctors serve their patients. Will you support Ontario's doctors? Mr. Speaker, will the Premier support Ontario's physicians and support patient care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We are actually investing in more patient care. The individual decisions of particular practitioners—the member opposite will have to talk to those practitioners. But there is nothing in our government's policy, there is nothing in our investments that would—

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Talk to the doctors, not the pandas.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Renfrew.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: If the Leader of the Opposition is taking a position that somehow we should put all our resources into increasing the compensation for the highest-paid physicians in the country—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin–Caledon, second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —then I would challenge him to say, in fact, we need to support health care workers across—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Leeds–Grenville, second time.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We need to help support personal support workers. We need to make sure that we have the nurses in our hospitals that are necessary. We

need to make sure that hospitals have the budgets that they need. That's why investing $345 million more in hospitals, and $1 billion more in health care, is exactly what should happen at this juncture.

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

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: I appreciate the government's talking points, but I am sharing real stories, real stories of patients that we hear outside of this Queen's Park bubble. Let me share a few more stories.

We know that the postpartum depression clinic for mental health at Ontario Shores is only able to open one day a week because of this government's cuts. Cuts are threatening the obstetrics unit at Georgian Bay General Hospital. The government still hasn't committed to hiring a new doctor for obstetrics and gynecology at the unit in Leamington.

Mr. Speaker, today is International Women's Day. I have outlined examples of how maternal health is being cut. Will the government—will the Premier—commit to stopping the cuts to maternal health in Ontario?

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

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The leader of the official opposition can try to spin this any way that he wants to. It's interesting that he brought up the maternal unit, the obstetrics unit, at Leamington hospital, because in fact, just a couple of weeks ago, we announced an additional $1.3 million, which will allow for the hiring of three new obstetricians at Leamington hospital, to make sure that that clinic, that birthing unit, that obstetrical unit stays open.

Frankly, I have to give some credit to the backbencher from Chatham–Kent–Essex for working co-operatively with me, with the community, with the local leadership to find a solution that will actually maintain the ability of women from the Leamington area to deliver in the province. So that's a bad example.

It's a good example of how, if we do co-operate—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Even if the comments are directed to the Chair, I am going to ask that any of the gestures to inflame come to me.

New question.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I want to begin, on behalf of New Democrats, by wishing every woman in this legislative precinct, across the OPS, and women and girls across Ontario a happy International Women's Day.

My question is to the Premier. On International Women's Day, let's recognize and celebrate the many great accomplishments of Ontario women, yet we also have to recognize that Ontario has the most expensive child care in Canada. The 2016-17 budget doesn't do anything for child care in Ontario. It doesn't add a single dollar for new child care spaces in the entire province—just announcements and re-announcements. Just last year, the Premier actually campaigned against a $15-per-day national child care program.

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Can this Premier explain why moms and dads in Ontario are paying the highest child care costs in Canada and this budget doesn't add any new funding for child care spaces for Ontario families?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to acknowledge how important it is that when women are at work and need the support of child care, we have those services in place.

Everyone in this Legislature and families across Ontario know that full-day kindergarten for every four- and five-year-old in this province has changed the landscape in terms of early childhood education in the province, Mr. Speaker, and it has changed the dynamics around child care. There's absolutely no doubt about that.

There is a regulation right now that is out for consultation. We continue to put more money into child care and create more spaces, recognizing that with four- and five-year-olds—and some three-year-olds, if they have a late birthday—in full-day kindergarten, the kids who are in child care are of a different age and we need to adapt to that new reality. We're in a transition on that front.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: No matter how many times the Liberals say it, full-day kindergarten is not child care in the province of Ontario. It is not child care.

It's not just New Democrats saying that this budget fails families and leaves families in the lurch. The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care says, "Families that believed Ontario would prioritize work on a national early learning and child care plan will be bitterly disappointed by this reversal." Parents across Ontario took the government at its word that it would deliver. Instead, less than a quarter of Ontario children can access regulated child care spaces, and for another year parents will have to be paying child care that they can barely afford or have to put their careers on hold.

This Premier has already admitted that her budget is full of mistakes. Will she admit it was a mistake not to invest in child care in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Education is going to want to comment on the last question, Mr. Speaker.

I just need to be clear that since 2003, child care funding in this province has doubled, from $532 million to over $1 billion. The number of child care spaces in Ontario has grown to nearly 351,000; that's an increase of 87% since 2003. In 2016, we're providing $1.05 billion to 47 municipalities; that's an increase in overall funding of $16.3 million over last year.

The reality is that thousands of families across this province have the ability now to send their kids to full-day kindergarten. I know perfectly well that full-day kindergarten is not child care. That's why we continue to invest in child care in addition to full-day kindergarten. They're two different things—

Interjections.

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

Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's shameful that this Premier, even in her response, tried to muddy the waters around the difference between child care and all-day learning. It's a disgrace.

Every dollar invested in child care, Speaker, brings $1.50 in economic returns. That's because when parents can find affordable child care it means more moms and dads, but more often moms, can get back to work. It's a smart investment; I would have thought that this Premier would have believed that. It's one of the basics that people expect their government to get right.

This budget has a lot of reannouncements and even some re-reannouncements, but what it doesn't have is more affordable, quality, licensed child care for moms, dads and their children across Ontario. The Premier has acknowledged she got her budget wrong already. Will she fix it and invest in affordable, licensed child care for families?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I would like to point out that the figures that the Premier just quoted are, in fact, child care figures, quite distinct from full-day kindergarten figures.

In addition to the figures that the Premier has mentioned, which have to do with increasing capital spending and increasing operating spending, we're also increasing the wage subsidy for our workers in licensed child care this year. For our ECEs in licensed child care—our front-line child care workers—the subsidy is going up from $1 an hour to $2 an hour in this year's budget. For people who work in licensed home child care, the subsidy is going up from $10 a day to $20 a day. That's in this year's budget.

In addition, there's additional capital this year for new child care spaces. Over three years we're building 4,000 new child care spaces.

CHILD CARE

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Premier. It's shameful that after 12 years in office there is still such a patchwork of child care in this province that there isn't enough licensed, affordable, quality child care for families in Ontario.

Parents in Ontario should be able to expect the highest quality in child care, and no parent should have to worry that their kids' safety is being put at risk. Parents across Ontario are worried about the changes to child care regulations that would mean more children with fewer adults.

The Coalition for Better Child Care says that the Premier's new rules will not improve quality and safety in child care. Martha Friendly from the Child Care Resource and Research Unit says, "If they bring this in, Ontario will be leading the race to the bottom."

Why is this Premier leading the race to the bottom in child care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I very much appreciate the input from advocates like Martha Friendly and the work that they have done for years to promote early years education. Part of the promotion of early years education has been to support our government as we implement full-day kindergarten, because that was seen in early years education as a very, very important step forward, and we've taken that step.

What that means is that we have to continue to invest in child care, because of course full-day kindergarten is not the same thing as child care. They are different things, and so as we have implemented full-day kindergarten, we have continued to work with the child care sector to transform that sector.

The fact is that it is important that we modernize the child care sector. That's why the regulation is out for consultation, and we appreciate input from everyone who's close to the issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Pascal report was a road map for better child care and early child care education, but instead of following the road map, this Premier has veered off the road. Instead of expanding and making sure we have better integrated child care, we're seeing fragmented care here. Mums and dads are struggling to piece together the care that their kids need.

Now the government's plan will mean more kids with fewer adults. It's going to mean lower-quality child care in Ontario. I don't think that's what Mr. Pascal was talking about when he put together his report.

The question is a simple one, and I haven't heard an answer yet: Why is this Premier leading the race to the bottom on child care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: One of the things that we've been doing actually is taking a bit of advice from Mr. Pascal, which was that we should look at the child care ratio issues which had been there for about 20 years. We've been working with a committee of advisors. We concluded, when we looked at what's happened in that 20 years since we last adjusted the ratios, that there were two significant things. Yes, we did introduce full-day kindergarten, and that means that what parents need for their four- and five-year-olds in terms of child care has changed, so we need to change. The other thing we've discovered is that over the last 20 years, maternity leave rules have changed. In fact, with a combination of maternity and paternity leaves, most parents are looking for child care at 12 months now because they're returning to work at 12 months. We are addressing that.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I have met with parents across Ontario who have seen their municipal child care centres closing. Those were fantastic centres that kids loved and that parents depended on. Now the experts are ringing the alarm bells that the quality of child care in Ontario is going to get even worse. Ontarians know we should be moving forward. Parents should be seeing more affordable care and quality should never be compromised.

Will this Premier actually start moving forward and not backward on quality and affordability for child care in the province of Ontario?

1120

Hon. Liz Sandals: What we are actually doing is we're adjusting the ratios so that there will be more spaces available for the 12-to-24-month group, which is where parents are really struggling to enter the system and find spaces. But we're not putting more kids; we're actually doing the opposite. We're decreasing the ratios. For infants—in the old zero-to-18-month category, it used to be 3 to 10, a maximum size of 10—we're reducing that so that it will be 1 to 3, a maximum size of nine, and you now have to have two qualified ECEs in the room.

Similarly, with the toddler age group: Yes, we're changing the age group to 12-to-24 months, but we're actually changing the ratio so it's only 1 to 4, and two qualified ECEs will have to be in the room. We're actually going to create the opportunity for more spaces for 12-to-24-month-olds, which is what parents tell us they need.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. Yesterday, we provided details of the LCBO document that states, "The LCBO's main intention is to sell properties." The government's response was nothing short of a Keystone Cops episode: The Premier said, "We're only selling as needed." The finance minister told the media, "We're selling, but leasing back." The infrastructure minister said, "We're not selling. Full stop." But all three contradict what's in the exact document.

Let's face it, Speaker: They got caught again.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Because your question is ridiculous.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: This government is in complete disarray. Why should Ontarians trust them to do anything when they can't get their story straight?

My question, Speaker, is this: Which one wants to do the backpedalling today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Inspector Clouseau lives in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

I'll read the response from the LCBO; I think it will clarify it completely. "LCBO confirms earlier statements today by Minister Charles Sousa"—that would be me, Mr. Speaker—"that it has no plans to reduce the size of its 654-store network through the sale of LCBO-owned locations. In fact, LCBO is investing in expanding both the size and scope of its retail network to further improve customer service."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Back to the Premier: Let me read more from the document that contradicts all the public statements that they made yesterday. These are direct quotes from the document.

The realtor would "determine the"—

Interjections.

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

Mr. Steve Clark: They're doing the backstroke over there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is not helpful at all when I'm trying to defend your own member.

Please finish.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: A direct quote: The realtor would "determine the highest and best use of the properties; perform credit checks on potential tenants; and coordinate all related activity with the tenant including move-in."

Speaker, they can say all they want about their plans now, and we've heard a few versions, as you've seen, but this document proves what they were planning to do.

Will the Premier admit today that her government got caught, again, trying to sell LCBO stores to bring one-time cash to make the deficit look smaller in advance of the next election?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I'm shocked that the member opposite, who prides himself on being a businessman, who takes pride in being a critic of finance, doesn't have a concept or a clue about the way business operates.

That's what this is all about. We're putting an RFP for brokerage services so that we can provide greater efficiencies in the service delivery of all of the real estate transactions, leases, rentals and buy-and-sell agreements. That is part of normal operations of the LCBO's 654-store network. That will continue. An RFP is put out there for public use; it's nothing private—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: You got caught.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And so did the member from Nipissing. Come to order.

Hon. Charles Sousa: Keystone Cops, right over there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. This kind of to and fro that I just heard, because I heard it from the other side—regrettably, when I was ready to admonish one, I have to admonish the other. That's not helpful to the debate.

New question.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Minister of Finance. Yesterday I was in Kitchener and Brantford, listening to seniors who are worried about the Liberals' plan to nearly double the cost of prescription drugs. Most of the seniors I met were women. Many of them dedicated their lives to raising their families, and now they live on very limited fixed incomes. In fact, the median income for single elderly women in Ontario is $4,000 less than it is for male seniors. The research shows that

elderly women also need more prescriptions each year. But the Liberals want to force these elderly women to pay more for every prescription they need, starting this August.

Everyone but the Premier can see that it's the wrong thing to do. These women feel vulnerable, but they are more than willing to fight; that's what they said to me yesterday. Will the minister admit that the Premier's plan to nearly double the cost of prescriptions won't just hurt seniors, but will discriminate against elderly women in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Minister of Health.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, I'm actually very pleased to get this question because the very individuals that the member opposite is referencing—single women, seniors in this province, who are having the most difficulty getting by—are precisely those that this budget will help, by bringing in 173,000 more of them who currently pay $100 deductible for their drug plan each year. They will pay zero deductible. We're saving them a considerable amount of money.

But there's more that we're offering to actually acknowledge the difficulty that those poorest seniors face. In fact, this will apply to all our seniors. Previously, a pharmacist could bill for a prescription, including the co-payment, on a monthly basis. if they chose to do that. You might get a prescription for three months but they would fill it only for one month, so you might be forced to pay 12 times over the course of the year. We're changing that. I'm happy to talk about that more in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Today is International Women's Day, and the Minister of Finance should actually recognize what higher drug costs will mean for elderly women. Our mothers, our grandmothers and the older women in our lives live on less money and they take more medications. An elderly woman living on $20,000 or $30,000 a year is not a rich senior. Already, she struggles every month and she simply cannot afford to pay more. This Liberal government wants to nearly double the cost of her prescription drugs and force many elderly women to cut back wherever they can. Yesterday, we heard this will impact a food budget for seniors, and it's on every prescription, just for them to stay healthy. This is a really serious issue, and I don't think this government is addressing it. You needed to consult before you brought in this change.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Through the Chair, please.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Will the minister admit that the Premier's plan to nearly double the cost of prescriptions will hurt elderly women across the province of Ontario?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: A lot of seniors were frustrated. They would get a prescription for three months from their doctor, they would go to the pharmacist, and the pharmacist would only give them a one-month supply but charge them the full co-payment of $6.11. We've already made that change, where pharmacists now can only bill the province on a quarterly basis, even if they give out the medicine monthly. There's no incentive to do that anymore. So we've reduced, in many cases, by 75% the costs to a senior or to, quite frankly, any individual in this province.

We have the most generous drug program for seniors in the country. In fact, the closest province in terms of out-of-pocket costs for seniors is twice what Ontario is. Ontario's average out-of-pocket costs for seniors are $277 annually. The next closest is $600.

I didn't get a chance to reference some of the provinces. In fact, out east in PEI, it's $957 each year that a senior is expected to pay out of pocket. We have the most generous program in the whole country. We're going to keep it that way.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is for the minister responsible for women's issues. Today marks International Women's Day. I'm so proud of my two daughters, Kelly and Stacey, and my beautiful granddaughter, Carling, who is finishing her third year at Queen's University right now.

I'm also very proud to be a member of a government that takes women's issues so seriously. The minister responsible for women's issues plays an important role in our cabinet. She brings a gender lens to cabinet decision-making. She has exhibited remarkable leadership in the government's efforts to address gender-based violence and to improve women's economic independence and security.

1130

Can the minister please update the House on her progress on these initiatives since the last International Women's Day?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'd like to thank the member from Barrie for this question. I also want to wish everyone in this Legislature, an everyone in Ontario, a happy International Women's Day.

We've had a fantastic year, Speaker, at the Ontario Women's Directorate. We've done that work with many government ministries. We introduced our sexual violence and harassment action plan to change attitudes, improve supports for survivors who come forward about abuse, and make workplaces and campuses safer. We launched a public education campaign that's reached over 84 million people, and market research shows us that this is having a positive impact on people's attitudes. This Legislature has debated the sexual violence and harassment action plan legislation, Bill 132, and I'm very excited about this bill being voted on after question period today. And we have a round table chaired by two wonderful women here on violence against women.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'd like to thank the minister for her answer and for her work on the sexual violence and harassment action plan over the last year. I'd also like to

recognize the work of the violence against women round table and its co-chairs since its establishment last March.

I know the minister has also been working with other members of cabinet on a number of initiatives that will make Ontario a safer and more inclusive province. These collaborations across ministries are important to ensuring that—

Mr. Paul Miller: Is this a question or a statement? I'm not sure. It sounds like a pre-cast statement. When's the question coming?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: —that issues that affect women are treated with the seriousness they deserve—in spite of the heckling across the hall.

Can the minister please describe some of her work across government to address these important issues?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thank you again to the member from Barrie for the question. She's absolutely right: We work with many ministries on this important file. To highlight a few: We partner with the Ministry of Labour to establish a steering committee to address the persistent and unacceptable issue of the gender wage gap. We've worked with the Ministry of Finance to establish the comply-or-explain amendments required for TSX-listed companies to report publicly on their approach to increasing the number of women on their boards. The women's directorate is currently co-leading the development of a human trafficking strategy with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. And just a few weeks ago, I joined with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and our Premier to announced the $100-million strategy to end violence against indigenous women.

These partnerships are critical to our success, and we are committed to moving the women's agenda further and stronger so that women will enjoy—

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

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Todd Smith: My question this morning is for the Minister of Education. Last week, I asked the minister if she was prepared to guarantee that Sagonaska Demonstration School in Belleville would not close, and the first word out of her mouth was, "Yes." But over the weekend, we heard from union officials that the government is returning teachers currently on secondment to schools like Sagonaska back to their home boards for next school season—this after we learned last week that the government had stopped enrolment at the schools for the upcoming school year.

The minister can't have it both ways. I'll ask the same question I asked last week of the minister: Will she guarantee that she will not close Sagonaska Demonstration School in Belleville?

Hon. Liz Sandals: That's actually not the question you asked last week. What I said last week, and what I will repeat today, is that it is important to distinguish which schools we are consulting on and which schools we're not consulting on, because there is a great deal of confusion. We are not consulting on the Whitney school for the deaf in Belleville. We are not consulting on the school for the blind in your hometown of Brampton. We are not consulting on the school for the deaf, Drury, in Milton. You asked me last week if Whitney would be staying open, and I said yes; I absolutely guaranteed Whitney would be staying open. We're not even consulting on it.

But what I have also said repeatedly is that we are in the process of consulting on the other schools, and no decisions have been made.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: We can rewind the tape, Mr. Speaker. I have it on my YouTube. Clearly, the minister said last week—the first word out of her mouth when asked about Sagonaska, was, "Yes." However, I had the opportunity to visit Sagonaska school last week. I met with parents, I met with staff, I met with the students, I met with the teachers. This school is making an incredible difference in our province.

Two of the students that I talked to last week, Mr. Speaker, should have been in grade 8 at their home schools but they have severe learning disabilities. In just a few short months after arriving at Sagonaska Demonstration School these students are now up to their grade level in reading. They're back up to grade 8. Miraculous things actually are happening at these demonstration schools in Ontario. One parent told me that Sagonaska school saved their kids' lives. It was an emotional visit to this demonstration school last week.

Because of this Liberal government's inefficiency in managing its dollars, it's putting the school at risk. Will she guarantee Sagonaska school will remain open?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Liz Sandals: The member opposite is correct. The programs for very-high-needs students at the demonstration schools are, in fact, quite wonderful; I agree. I've been visiting the programs as well. They work with children who have severe learning disabilities, who are of average or above average intelligence and who are many, many grades behind in terms of their ability to read. But there is a limited number of children who have access to those programs, and what we need to think about is all the children in Ontario who are struggling to read. Because we know that the demonstration schools are serving literally 150 of the children in Ontario who struggle to read, we know there are thousands more there, and we—

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

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order.

New question.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Peggy Sattler: In recognition of International Women's Day, I have a question for the Attorney General. Yesterday, the Attorney General refused to explain why the 2016 funding allocations for partner assault response include a 50% cut to the Windsor PAR Program and a 25% cut for Elgin. I'd like to list all the cuts that have been made this year but have been unable to get that information from her ministry.

Why did the minister ignore the advice of virtually everyone who understands what is needed to end violence against women and instead cut the only government program designed to change the behaviour of abusers?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you to the member for this question. As I said yesterday, Mr. Speaker, PAR is a very, very important program. Last year, over 11,000 offenders were referred to this program. We are committed to collaborating with stakeholders on a way to further improve PAR. What I said yesterday is that the PAR Program has been increased. Our government's annual investment in the PAR Program has increased by 47%, from $7.2 million in 2004-05 to $10.6 million in 2015-16.

We know that some service providers are concerned about the decline in referral rates and that—

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: A lot has changed over the 12 years that the minister refers to.

I understand that there is a stakeholder meeting coming up on April 20. I also understand that not a single representative from the sector has been involved in planning for that meeting, not even the minister's own partner assault response advisory committee. Given the minister's actions to date and the comments she has made, there are real concerns about her commitment to meaningful collaboration.

1140

Does this minister realize that her refusal to acknowledge the crisis in PAR is putting the safety of women and children at risk? Will she commit to honest dialogue on April 20 and guarantee that the meeting is not just providing lip service to consultation in order to make further cuts to PAR?

Interjections.

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

Attorney General.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Funding allocations are based on referral rates and demands for service in each jurisdiction. It is readjusted. In some areas, if the demand is very low, then the budget is readjusted.

We have heard a lot of concern about this program, and that's why I have called a meeting of all our partners to come and tell us what is not working in the program and if there is change to bring about to the program. We are, of course, listening to our partners, because they deliver the program. We are also consulting with experts on the topic of domestic violence. We will, I'm sure, come back with an improved program. This actual program will continue.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade.

Since the first North American free trade agreements were negotiated almost 30 years ago, an export market has become one that you have to cross an ocean to reach. In 2013, Ontario introduced its Going Global strategy to help Ontario companies capitalize on global export trends and needs, compete more effectively and become more productive. That strategy helped new and existing firms large and small to respond to market needs in emerging export markets.

Our province has brought together Ontario private sector decision-makers and their overseas counterparts during trade missions such as the one on which I joined the minister in India this winter. Will the minister tell the House how Ontario will pursue international trade opportunities during this year of 2016?

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity, and I also want to thank the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for asking.

The 2016 budget reaffirmed this government's commitment to jobs and economic prosperity. I was pleased to see that our budget addresses our needs in international trade by dedicating $30 million over the next three years. This funding will allow us to continue our global trade strategy, to plan and execute Premier- and minister-led trade missions, and to continue to connect Ontario businesses with the world.

It also allowed us to host the Europe Global Export Forum in Toronto. The forum enabled Ontario's small and medium-sized companies to explore new market opportunities in Europe and connect with incoming buyer delegations.

The 2016 budget will allow us to continue to sell Ontario worldwide.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, western Mississauga has prospered through the outreach of our firms into high-skills and high-value agreements with firms outside Canada. One need only look at aerospace manufacturer Cyclone Manufacturing in Meadowvale as an example of a company growing at 20% per year and forging new agreements with European and Asian partners as well as its aerospace base here in North America.

The province's 2016-17 budget built upon the groundwork the province has laid during the past decade to attract international investors to Ontario and to enable Ontario firms to compete overseas. Will the minister tell the House how the measures proposed in Ontario's 2016-17 budget enhance trade opportunities for Ontario exporters, large and small?

Hon. Michael Chan: I'm very proud of the current budget. Speaker, $10 million each year will allow my ministry to expand our trade opportunities—

Mr. Paul Miller: How are you doing with steel exports? Really well. You're doing really good there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Oh, no, actually, keep it going. I'll just remind the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek: The closer he gets to the chair, the easier it is for me to hear. Just to let him know.

Minister.

Hon. Michael Chan: It will be moving-back time.

As the member is aware, Speaker, our trade missions provide opportunities for Ontario businesses to connect with relevant investors abroad. Our mission to China in the fall of 2014 secured $1 billion in investment, creating 1,400 jobs for Ontarians. Our follow-up mission to China in 2015 resulted in over $2 billion in investment, creating 1,700 jobs. Our mission to India last month resulted in $240 million in investment and created 150 skilled jobs.

DISCRIMINATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question's to the Premier. Today is International Women's Day, and while I'm proud to say that gender equality has come a long way since the first day of commemoration in 1911, this government has made decisions that have set Ontario back by decades.

This government, led by the Premier, has allowed two publicly funded colleges to offer courses at its campuses in Saudi Arabia, but women weren't allowed on those campuses. When asked about it by the media, the Premier denied knowing anything about it. The minister blamed the colleges and then blamed his predecessor. John Milloy said that the funding was approved by cabinet, which the Premier was a member of.

Speaker, can the Premier explain why those campuses were funded and why she couldn't get her facts straight?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our colleges. Our colleges are among the best in the world. That's why they have been well thought of around the world.

The Saudi government put out a request for proposals throughout the world, and our colleges bid on those proposals. Algonquin College bid on two proposals: one for building a college for males and the other one for building a college for females. Their proposal for building a college for male students was successful. They are successfully operating in Saudi Arabia. Their bid for a female college wasn't successful, but they are going to bid again on building a college for female students, if the proposal comes up from Saudi Arabia.

Again, we are very proud of our colleges. They are very well thought of around the world, and we will continue our efforts to support our colleges.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Mr. Speaker, that doesn't make it okay, and the Premier should be answering this question.

Our students—in fact, all Ontarians—were shocked and disappointed that this government not only allowed but funded such a blatantly discriminatory practice. Because of a sheer lack of accountability, the government allowed a practice that shames our province and our values of equality and freedom. In this province and across this country, we know that boys and girls equally can achieve their full potential. The Premier has said that the government should be a force for good, yet she allowed our province's reputation—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader, second time.

Ms. Laurie Scott: —to sink back to the dark ages.

Mr. Speaker, why did the Premier allow such discrimination to happen right under her nose?

Interjections.

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

Minister.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Again, we are very proud of the function of our colleges. For example, Niagara College has been active in Saudi Arabia for a number of years, and they have been training, actually, 120 female professionals to become medical/clinical administrative officers in Saudi Arabia, with the assistance of the King Faisal hospital. They have been active in Saudi Arabia, training male and female students, and we will continue to support our colleges.

Our colleges are doing a great job. Our colleges are training our students, as well as offering their services to other countries around the world. Since we came to office, we have increased funding to our colleges and universities by 83%. Per-student funding has been increased by 32% for our universities and 55% for our colleges, so we are supporting our colleges. Also, we would like our academic institutions to go global and—

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

New question.

1150

PAY EQUITY

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Minister of Labour.

Women in Ontario are still getting paid less than men. Women are still more likely to work in low-paid jobs and less likely to be promoted. Women are still getting paid less than men for equal work.

Nearly 30 years ago, the Ontario government passed pay equity legislation requiring equal pay for work of equal value, but today women are still earning up to 31%

less. Worse, racialized women, indigenous women and women with disabilities still face a larger gap.

Women deserve to see concrete action from this government, and our young women need to feel some hope. On International Women's Day, will this government stand up for women across this province and take immediate action to address the wage gap?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I do want to thank the member for that question. It's an extremely important issue. It's great to see members from all parties in the Legislature today stand and rise and recognize International Women's Day. I think it says something about this chamber.

Women make up an integral part of our economy—I think we all agree with that—and society, but on average, they do not earn as much as men. What we've done about that is announced the creation of a wage gap steering committee. They've been active for the past year. They've been working along with the minister responsible for women's issues. What they're doing is, they're travelling the province and they're receiving advice from ordinary Ontarians, and those Ontarians who have expertise in this regard. They'll be reporting back to me with a strategy that's aimed at closing the earning gap between men and women in this province.

Speaker, this is an issue whose time has come. We're determined to build on the progress that we've already made in this regard.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Cindy Forster: With the right legislation and a real commitment to act, we know that the gender gap could be eliminated. This government talks a lot about the gender wage gap, but we've seen no action. Instead, women in this province continue to fall further and further behind under this Liberal government, a government that refuses to even comply with and enforce its own pay equity laws in many female-dominated workplaces and for professionals in education, health and many of the community sectors of this province.

Minister, it's 2016, nearly 30 years later. How can this government justify allowing the gender wage gap to continue to widen?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Quite frankly, Speaker, the answer is, we don't. We don't accept that and we shouldn't accept that, not one of the parties in this House. We should take pride. We're the only jurisdiction that I'm aware of, in this country, that is tackling this issue head-on. We're taking the issue on.

The gender wage gap is a complex issue. It's got many factors that add to it. We've heard from a diverse group of people across this province who share the same feeling as us: that this is unacceptable, that that gap needs to be closed, and that there shouldn't be a gap in the first place.

What this strategy is going to do, in a very factual way and in a very practical way, is propose recommendations that will close that wage gap that still exists between women and men in this province.

The short summary of the answer is that we agree with the member and we're doing something about it; we're the only province that is.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Soo Wong: My question is for the Minister of Labour.

Minister, over the past few weeks, I've constantly heard from the parties opposite about precarious work. I also hear from my constituents in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt and service agencies like Agincourt Community Services Association about unpaid wages, gender inequality and scheduling conflicts in their workplaces.

In my recent post-budget round table discussion, I heard from young constituents like Elaine, Nancy, D'Yuan and Kevin. They asked about stronger labour law protection and updating our current labour laws. These young people know that our government supports them and has a plan.

Speaker, through you to the minister, can you please update the House about what steps your ministry is taking to ensure that my constituents and workers across this province are protected and supported at work?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Once again, I want to thank the member for that excellent question.

Precarious work is a very, very important issue, and I'm proud of the early steps we've taken. To add to this, our government has tabled a budget in this House that demonstrates our dedication to creating good, full-time jobs in this province.

At the Ministry of Labour, we've got two excellent advisers. They've been working all year to ensure that those people who work in the province of Ontario have the right protections in place that reflect the modern economy. It's called the Changing Workplaces Review, and what it does is take into account that the workplace many of us grew up in simply isn't the workplace of today, and the legislation needs to catch up to that.

The budget also commits to support, as I've said previously, the gender wage gap strategy, because we know a wage gap exists there, and that adds further to precarious employment.

We're going out to the public and saying, "This isn't acceptable anymore. What do we need to do to change this?" We're getting some excellent advice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Soo Wong: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I'm very pleased to see that our government supports all workers in Ontario, no matter the type of work, its size or location. Residents and service agencies in my riding of Scarborough–Agincourt are keen to hear from the minister when he receives both the Changing Workplaces Review interim report and the gender wage gap committee's recommendations.

Until then, can the minister please outline what the government is doing right now to help Ontario workers to not only feel safe at work but also understand their rights and responsibilities?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Again, I'd really like to thank the member for that question. The work being done by the Changing Workplaces special advisers and the

gender wage gap steering committee are really just two examples of how the Ministry of Labour is making Ontario one of the best places to work, and one of the safest places to work, in all of North America.

Speaker, this government was the first government to proactively go out and inspect workplaces. We feel it's our job to make sure employers play by the rules and that employees know their rights when they go to work. These inspections are truly bringing in results. Since 2005, the Ministry of Labour has recovered approximately $141 million in unpaid wages and other money that's owed to employees.

We know that educating people and bringing awareness plays a huge role in ensuring that Ontario workplaces are not only safe but fair. We have a website, and I'd urge people in Ontario to—

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

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Last month, the government announced that they were creating a $100-million fund so that homeowners using natural gas can more easily receive an energy audit and potential assistance on retrofitting their furnaces. The problem, according to the Canadian Propane Association and the Canadian Oil Heat Association, is that people who heat their homes with a propane or oil furnace are completely excluded.

For many people in northern and rural Ontario, natural gas is simply not available. Speaker, to the minister: Will they clarify this? Because I heard from the Deputy Premier today that they're going to make that program available to people who heat with propane or oil. Will the minister clarify today for the people of Ontario? Because if they're misunderstanding it, let us know. But if it is strictly for natural gas, then fix it and stop attacking people in rural Ontario.

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: Union Gas and Enbridge are finding the ways and means to ensure that the other types of fuels will be included in that program, Mr. Speaker.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order: the member from Ottawa–Orléans.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I would just like to introduce two constituents of mine who are here: one in the gallery, Jean Hébert, who's here today; and also a paramedic from Ottawa, Norm Robillard. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order: the member from Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Page captain Micah Joy Tamminga is joined today by her grandmother Catherine McLean; her grandfather, Malcolm McLean; her grandmother Jule House McLean; and her sisters Claire and Morgan. They're in the gallery today. Welcome.

DEFERRED VOTES

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT ACTION PLAN ACT (SUPPORTING SURVIVORS AND CHALLENGING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT), 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE PLAN D'ACTION CONTRE LA VIOLENCE ET LE HARCÈLEMENT SEXUELS (EN SOUTIEN AUX SURVIVANTS ET EN OPPOSITION À LA VIOLENCE ET AU HARCÈLEMENT SEXUELS)

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

Bill 132, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to sexual violence, sexual harassment, domestic violence and related matters / Projet de loi 132, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la violence sexuelle, le harcèlement sexuel, la violence familiale et des questions connexes.

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

The division bells rang from 1159 to 1204.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would all members please take their seats?

On Monday, March 7, 2016, Ms. MacCharles moved third reading of Bill 132, An Act to amend various statutes with respect to sexual violence, sexual harassment, domestic violence and related matters.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul
Anderson, Granville	Gélinas, France	Moridi, Reza
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gravelle, Michael	Munro, Julia
Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Murray, Glen R.
Bailey, Robert	Harris, Michael	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Baker, Yvan	Hatfield, Percy	Naqvi, Yasir
Ballard, Chris	Hillier, Randy	Natyshak, Taras
Barrett, Toby	Hoggarth, Ann	Nicholls, Rick
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Horwath, Andrea	Orazietti, David
Bisson, Gilles	Hoskins, Eric	Pettapiece, Randy
Bradley, James J.	Hudak, Tim	Potts, Arthur
Brown, Patrick	Hunter, Mitzie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Chiarelli, Bob	Jones, Sylvia	Sandals, Liz
Clark, Steve	Kiwala, Sophie	Sattler, Peggy
Coe, Lorne	Lalonde, Marie-France	Scott, Laurie
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Coteau, Michael	MacLaren, Jack	Smith, Todd
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder	Sousa, Charles
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Tabuns, Peter
Del Duca, Steven	Mantha, Michael	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Martins, Cristina	Thompson, Lisa M.
Dhillon, Vic	Martow, Gila	Vanthof, John
Dickson, Joe	Matthews, Deborah	Vernile, Daiene
Dong, Han	Mauro, Bill	Walker, Bill
Duguid, Brad	McDonell, Jim	Wilson, Jim
Fedeli, Victor	McGarry, Kathryn	Wong, Soo
Fife, Catherine	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted	Yakabuski, John
Forster, Cindy	McNaughton, Monte	Zimmer, David

Fraser, John Meilleur, Madeleine
French, Jennifer K. Milczyn, Peter Z.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 94; the nays are 0.

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

Third reading agreed to.

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

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order: the Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I want to correct my record. I believe that I might have said that the school for the blind is in Brampton, and I know perfectly well it is in Brantford.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All members have a right to correct their own record, for sure.

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

The House recessed from 1209 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my honor to introduce Vince and Espy Leitao, who are joining us here this afternoon. Welcome to the Legislature.

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

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: On International Women's Day, it's my pleasure to introduce to the House one of the greatest women I've ever met. My former constituency assistant and constituent, Nancy Clark, is joining us in the member's gallery.

Mr. Steve Clark: Good last name.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I think "one of"—his wife is fine. Sorry. I could get somebody in trouble with that. That's official; it's in Hansard too.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

KRAFT HOCKEYVILLE 2016

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise to congratulate everyone who helped Brockville's Rotary Park crack the top 10 in the Kraft Hockeyville 2016 contest. The competition has captured our city's heart. Of the 3,192 total Hockeyville nominations, a staggering 20% were for Brockville.

Credit for this remarkable response goes to Brockville's Young Professionals Network. Saturday night's announcement was the culmination of a goal they set since organizing a Winter Classic hockey weekend last weekend, and, boy, did they ever light the lamp. They've rallied our entire community using our national game to inspire people of all ages to dream big. The dream is to help the Brockville Rotary Park revitalization committee put a roof over our outdoor rink in downtown Brockville.

I was thrilled last month to play in this year's Winter Classic against the Montreal Canadiens old timers. It was an incredible weekend that scored $41,000. Making Kraft's top 10 added $25,000 more, but our work is not done. We're determined to make Hockeyville's number two spot and earn another $100,000. Voting at www.khv2016.ca starts at 9 a.m. Sunday and runs through 11:59 p.m. Monday. As the saying goes, let's vote early; let's vote often.

I'm also issuing a challenge to every area employer with a computer at their workplace. On Monday, make sure your employees log on and vote all day to crown Brockville as Kraft Hockeyville. This is important. We're not only building to win this competition; we're building a better and stronger community.

SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I just want to give an update to my colleagues in the House. I had the opportunity to tour southwestern Ontario last week as our party's critic for economic development, employment and infrastructure.

I talked to chamber of commerce members in Sarnia: Rick Perdeaux, Mark Lumley, David Moody and newly elected president and CEO Shirley de Silva. They have questions around infrastructure and some basic things that the province could do to really stimulate and open up markets with some enhancements to heavy hauling there. I'd love the government to take a look at that.

I met with Mayor Randy Hope in Chatham. He talked about infrastructure, he talked about economic development, and he talked about the Green Energy Act and the role that they've played in enhancing green energy projects in Chatham-Kent, as well as the cap-and-trade system, which they have some reservations around.

I went to Leamington and met with Bob Magri, who owns a greenhouse there; an amazing facility. It plays an enormous role in the economy in southwestern Ontario, specifically in Leamington. They have some questions around energy.

Then I went to Windsor and toured the Downtown Windsor Business Accelerator and met with Arthur Barbut, who is the director. They want to know why the ministry has left southwestern Ontario out of the innovation corridor. Are we not innovative enough for this government down in southwestern Ontario? Why don't you bring it down there? There are a lot of great things: a lot of jobs being created there and a lot of partnerships stimulating, innovating and partnering with small businesses. I'd love the government to take a second look at that.

REFUGEES

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share with you and the House—

Interjections.

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

To all members: You've got somebody who wants to make an announcement. Thank you.

Please continue.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to share with you and with members of this House news of several events that have taken place in Waterloo region in support of refugees displaced by the Syrian conflict who have now settled in my community. This past weekend, a benefit concert called Music of Heart and Home was a huge success.

As you know, Canada has reached its goal of welcoming 25,000 private and government-sponsored refugees from the Syrian conflict to our nation. Here in Ontario, our goal is to settle up to 12,000 of those refugees. Kitchener is not the largest centre in Ontario earmarked as a settlement location, but we were selected because we're good at this kind of thing. We have people there with big hearts who are willing to open up their wallets to help those in need.

Reception House is the lead agency in my community. I have met with the coordinators there and can report to you that they are doing a fantastic job of welcoming these newcomers, helping them to find homes, getting their kids into schools and assisting them to adjust to life in Canada. To date, there are almost 1,000 refugees from this conflict who have moved to Kitchener-Waterloo.

A week ago, I had the opportunity to attend a Syrian women's potluck dinner. The food was delicious, and although there was a language barrier, we managed to connect using gestures and smiles.

While we hear some political voices say that they want to build walls, here in Ontario I'm proud that we are building bridges to welcome people who are going to make Ontario a better place to live.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Todd Smith: Just over a week ago, the Environmental Review Tribunal set up by the Liberal government denied approval to a wind turbine installation in Prince Edward county because it would cause "irreversible harm" to the local ecosystem. A hearing to see if the harm can be lessened has yet to occur, but that hasn't stopped the German-owned company behind the project. They have informed locals that they intend to start clearing trees next week, regardless of what the government's environmental experts have said.

Why won't the government defend the environmental review process taxpayers have paid for and direct the company that no work be started until it has actually got approval from the ERT? The government is allowing wpd to ignore environmental approvals in a way that it would sue any other company for. Environmental experts, including those at the MNR, have said that this project will cause irreversible harm to several species at risk.

Why is it that we have yet another Liberal program where the rules only apply to the people the government wants them to apply to? The people of Prince Edward county deserve to know if the Premier will enforce the ruling of her government's own environmental experts, or will she admit that if you're a company this government likes, the rules don't really apply to you? Residents have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for their legal fees, and they've defeated two projects at the ERT.

I'm calling on the government to stay any construction on the south shore and stand with the people of Prince Edward county. The law is the law, Mr. Speaker.

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE

Mr. Peter Tabuns: This morning, I held a media conference to present Jonathan's Law. Jonathan's Law will make it possible for an employee whose child has died to have an unpaid leave of absence for up to 52 weeks. Currently, parents are entitled to a leave while a child is critically ill or if a child dies as the result of a crime. But when a child dies as a result of illness or accident, the parent is supposed to be ready to go back to work after 10 days.

The bill is named Jonathan's Law in tribute to Jonathan Leitao, who died of cancer in 2014. He was 16. Jonathan's father, Vince Leitao, and his mother, Espy Leitao, were part of the media conference this morning, and they spearheaded the work to pull together this bill.

I want to thank Jonathan Miles and Meighan Ferris-Miles, also bereaved parents of their very young son, and thank Carolyn Baltaz, who is the chair of Bereaved Families of Ontario. I thank all of them for the work they did to do the background research, pull together the law and show great courage and composure when presenting this to the media this morning.

COMMUNITY AWARDS

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'm delighted to stand in the House today first to wish everybody a happy International Women's Day and to highlight another great event that took place in my riding of Newmarket–Aurora. Last night at the Newmarket Seniors' Meeting Place, I had the privilege of recognizing 12 women and girls from across the riding as part of the Leading Women/Leading Girls Building Communities Recognition Program. The night was filled with testimonials from people who nominated the recipients, music from our young local talent and good cheer.

1510

This program recognizes women and girls whose leadership and initiative inspire and motivate the lives of girls and women in our communities. These incredible recipients inspire everyone they meet. They're positive role models to not just women and girls, but men and boys in the community as well.

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and congratulate the eight women and four girls from Newmarket–Aurora who received this award last night: Beverly Varcoe, Robin Taylor-Smith, Nancy Black, Jennifer Copely, Lexi Benlolo, Amanda Benlolo, Sanam

Juliette Mojgani, Cheryl Fraser, Lianne Schiavo, Melanie Bell, Manon Labrecque and Vivian Risi. Thank you to each and every one of you for your time and dedication to making our community of Newmarket–Aurora a better place. You truly are an inspiration to us all.

I'd also like to thank Debra Scott, the president and CEO of the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce, for her fantastic emceeing job last night. I look forward to an event next year that's even bigger and better.

HURON COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Today, I am proud to recognize the accomplishments of Huron county's economic development strategy. Over the past year, these initiatives have helped strengthen the economic and collaborative partnerships of my community.

Last spring, the Huron county economic development board and Huron county council partnered to support a county-wide strategic planning process—one of a kind. Since then, 10 municipal partners in Huron county have helped to identify economic development opportunities and have introduced priorities, goals and activities in a consistent and coordinated manner.

This collaborate approach has brought together municipal stakeholders with community organizers, and officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs have done a tremendous job facilitating the whole initiative.

These partners have worked tirelessly to help develop relationships of trust and support, foster leadership, streamline economic development and explore ideas for a collective impact.

This strategy has already gained attention from industry leaders and other Ontario municipalities. At the OGRA/ROMA conference, for instance, local Huron officials enjoyed a packed house during their hour-long panel on the county-wide economic development strategy. More recently, the board updated Huron county about their progress and upcoming initiatives over a breakfast meeting. The breakfast featured guest speaker Laurie Guthrie, an economic development specialist from New Brunswick, who spoke about funding a global network to attract business in the region.

Huron's economic development initiatives will help communities grow into a stronger and more economically collaborative place to live, do business and call home.

RAE LUCKOCK AND AGNES MACPHAIL

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Yesterday, I tabled my motion honouring two female MPPs. Today, on the UN international day of women, I want to recognize these important legislators: Rae Luckock and Agnes Macphail.

Many of you know Agnes Macphail. She was the first female member of Parliament and one of the first female members of provincial Parliament in Ontario, elected in 1943 along with another colleague, Rae Luckock.

Rae was elected in 1943. During her tenure, she made significant contributions to women's equality and the environment. As the MPP for Bracondale, she passionately argued for equal pay for equal work. She advocated that women at home should be paid for their work in the house. She also predicted that after the war, women who had been working would not want to return to their pre-war roles and argued that they would be able to continue their work.

Rae was also a person ahead of her time. During her two years in this chamber, she was outspoken on the issues of air pollution and forestry.

Agnes Macphail was a tireless champion of working-class farmers and women. Elected in 1943, she lost in 1945 but was re-elected in 1948. Her tremendous career was capped off with the passage of Ontario's first equal pay legislation in 1951.

I want to conclude by saying that I hope we can soon honour these two remarkable women with a permanent presence on the grounds of the Legislature.

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I was delighted to recently announce, with Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario president and CEO Lawrence Barns, that LDAO has received a $75,000 seed grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

This was exciting news for this wonderful organization, as the funds will be used to support their pilot LD@Home, a new web support service designed to assist Ontarians living with learning disabilities. The service will follow the model already available to support educators at www.LDatSchool.ca. The use of online delivery means that Ontarians won't be geographically isolated from tools to help increase their success in living with a learning disability.

Funds from the grant will be used to help with some staffing costs, website design and development, video production, and hosting fees for the website. LD@Home will provide that necessary link to the great programs that various chapters of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario offer to support both parents and students in navigating the challenges they face.

LDAO is a registered charity dedicated to improving the lives of children, youth and adults with learning disabilities. They offer many resources, services, information, venues and products designed to help people with learning disabilities and ADHD, as well as parents, teachers and other professionals.

I'm very happy to have LDAO in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, and I'm also excited that their new LD@Home website will offer invaluable insight and supports to marginalized youth and adults, as well as the families and friends who support them.

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

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated March 8, 2016, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies. Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

JONATHAN'S LAW (EMPLOYEE LEAVE OF ABSENCE WHEN CHILD DIES), 2016

LOI JONATHAN DE 2016 SUR LE CONGÉ DES EMPLOYÉS EN CAS DE DÉCÈS D'UN ENFANT

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 175, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 to entitle an employee whose child has died to a leave of absence / Projet de loi 175, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi pour donner aux employés dont l'enfant est décédé le droit à un congé.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The bill amends the Employment Standards Act, 2000, to provide that an employee who has been employed by his or her employer for at least six consecutive months is entitled to a leave of absence without pay of up to 52 weeks if a child of the employee dies.

MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS DAY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LA JOURNÉE DE SENSIBILISATION À LA SANTÉ MENTALE MATERNELLE

Mr. Anderson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 176, An Act to Proclaim Maternal Mental Health Awareness Day / Projet de loi 176, Loi proclamant la Journée de sensibilisation à la santé mentale maternelle.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Mr. Granville Anderson: The bill proclaims the first Wednesday of May of each year as Maternal Mental Health Awareness Day.

1520

DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE WORKPLACE LEAVE, ACCOMMODATION AND TRAINING ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR LE CONGÉ ET LES MESURES D'ACCOMMODEMENT POUR LES EMPLOYÉS VICTIMES DE VIOLENCE FAMILIALE OU SEXUELLE ET LA FORMATION DANS LE LIEU DE TRAVAIL

Ms. Sattler moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 177, An Act to amend the Employment Standards Act, 2000 in respect of leave and accommodation for victims of domestic or sexual violence and to amend the Occupational Health and Safety Act in respect of information and instruction concerning domestic and sexual violence / Projet de loi 177, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi à l'égard du congé et des mesures d'accommodement pour les victimes de violence familiale ou sexuelle et modifiant la Loi sur la santé et la sécurité au travail à l'égard des renseignements et directives concernant la violence familiale et sexuelle.

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

First reading agreed to.

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

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm very pleased to introduce this bill today, on International Women's Day. It is a bill to amend the Employment Standards Act to provide all Ontario employees with up to 10 days of paid leave if they or their children have experienced domestic violence or sexual violence. It also entitles them to flexible work arrangements in terms of hours of work or location of work and reasonable unpaid leave, if necessary. The leave must be used for purposes related to the violence, such as seeking medical attention, attending counselling sessions, accessing services from a rape crisis centre, women's shelter or similar organization, relocating, or dealing with police or the legal system.

The bill also amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act to require mandatory workplace training on domestic violence and sexual violence.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I rise today to recognize March 8 as International Women's Day.

Les communautés de l'Ontario célèbrent la Journée internationale de la femme.

Communities across Ontario are holding celebrations all week. This is a special day, set aside by the United Nations every year, to celebrate the many diverse accomplishments of women and girls around the world. The Canadian theme this year is "Women's Empowerment Leads to Equality."

Speaker, we have come a long way in empowering women in this province. Ontario women are leading corporations, making scientific discoveries, excelling in sports and so much more.

When I look back to International Women's Day last year, I'm proud of all that our government has done to further empower women over the last 12 months. We can continue to fulfill our commitment to achieve gender equity, support economic security for women and keep women and girls safe so they can reach their full potential.

En 2015, le gouvernement de l'Ontario a dévoilé un plan d'action pour mettre un terme à la violence et au harcèlement à caractère sexuel.

One year ago today, we launched Ontario's action plan to stop sexual violence and harassment called It's Never Okay. This morning, we released a progress report on its very successful first year.

Phase 1 of the action plan's award-winning public education campaign, built around the Twitter hashtag #WhoWillYouHelp, showed a measurable increase in awareness about sexual violence and harassment. Results indicated a shift in attitudes and behaviours of bystanders, many of whom now better understand the importance of intervening safely.

In the fall, we launched phase 2 of the public education campaign built around the hashtag #ItsNeverOkay. The objective is to now remove any grey areas, so that Ontarians know exactly what constitutes sexual harassment and violence. The sexual violence and harassment action plan will increase safety in the workplace and campuses and provide better supports to survivors.

I want to thank all the members of the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Their good work in clause-by-clause has definitely strengthened Bill 132.

All Ontarians deserve to be free of sexual violence and harassment in their communities, on campuses, in their workplaces and in homes. If we are to empower all women, we must first stop violence against all of the women and girls in our communities.

Last month, the Premier announced Walking Together: Ontario's Long-Term Strategy to End Violence Against Indigenous Women and girls. This strategy represents a $100-million commitment from the province to work with our indigenous partners to end violence against indigenous women. Walking Together lays out how Ontario and indigenous communities are coming together to end the cycle of violence and ensure future generations of indigenous women can live the way they deserve, with safety and respect.

We are also increasing empowerment through our Leading Women/Leading Girls Building Communities Recognition Program. This program encourages MPPs to recognize outstanding females who have made a positive difference in their communities. I want to say thank you to all the MPPs who participated in this program, and I hope you have a great local event celebrating your leading women and leading girls.

I also want to mention I'm proud that this province has taken action to increase the number of women in high-ranking leadership positions, including on corporate boards of directors. Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to develop the comply-or-explain regulation. Since the introduction of regulations in December 2014, several other provinces have followed our lead.

Speaker, this province has other supports and programs to empower women—too many to list here in my allotted time today. Although Ontario has accomplished a lot more for women than a number of other jurisdictions, I know that we still have a long way to go before we reach our goal of full gender equality.

That is why we must continue to work together to reduce poverty among women, close the gender wage gap, broaden gender diversity in positions of leadership, and make sure that no woman or girl is in fear or experiences violence.

I encourage everyone in Ontario to support equality for women and the empowerment of women on this International Women's Day and every day.

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

Therefore, it's time for responses.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Today, I am pleased to speak on behalf of our leader, Patrick Brown, and our entire PC caucus in recognizing International Women's Day. It is the 108th anniversary, and in particular, the United Nations theme for 2016 is "Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality." The UN's Step It Up initiative is a commitment to gender equality and that governments across the globe will address the challenges that are holding women and girls back from reaching their full potential.

Although we have made great strides, further progress is needed. The World Economic Forum produced a report saying that it would take until 2133 to achieve global gender parity—far too long, Mr. Speaker. There are steps that we can take now to help women and girls achieve their ambitions, to respect and value differences, and to develop more inclusive cultures.

The first International Women's Day was observed in March 1911. At that time, the right to vote, marital or property rights, and even the basic dignity to be recognized as a person were not afforded to women. Even now, in 2016, the struggle for equality is still a distant dream for many parts of the world.

Equality is about making sure that women, just as much as men, are afforded the same respect and opportunities. My female colleagues here in the Legislature, on

all sides, serve as great examples of the strides our society has made on all the possibilities that women can make. Women have real choices and real opportunities.

In Canada and in this province, the progress of women in education, business, sports, government and the arts has shaped so much of who we are. Having the choice to pursue an education is so powerful, as it paves the way to a brighter and better tomorrow. Girls are more likely to earn their high school diplomas on time and are less likely to drop out.

1530

A year ago, I said that I was optimistic and hopeful that we would see significant progress on a number of fronts on gender equality. Unfortunately, there is still a pervasive culture that is deeply rooted in misogyny and, quite simply, a lack of respect for women.

But I do want to recognize the progress we have made in the Legislature when it comes to dealing with sexual violence and harassment. Today we unanimously passed Bill 132, the Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act. It will receive royal assent this afternoon. Along with the #ItsNeverOkay campaign and #WhoWillYouHelp, these are positive steps forward, and I'm glad that we are dealing with this issue, because for far too long the stigma has made victims and survivors feel embarrassed, ashamed or, worse, guilty.

Since last year, the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment, which I was honoured to co-chair, produced a report that had input from survivors, family members, advocates and workers in health care, justice and social support.

As we commemorate International Women's Day, it is also important to bring human trafficking out of the dark. It is an underground and fast-growing crime that disproportionately targets girls averaging the age of 14. It is time to say that enough is enough; our girls are not for sale.

While I am disappointed that budget 2016 did not provide specific funding to tackle human trafficking right across this province, I call on the government to do what is right and act now to create a multi-jurisdictional task force of law enforcement agencies, crown prosecutors, judges, victims' services and front-line agencies to coordinate and help these survivors.

We must also pass Bill 158, the Saving the Girl Next Door Act, and say confidently that human trafficking will not be tolerated in this province. We all acknowledge that the crime is a crisis, not only in our province but in our communities and our neighbourhoods, and that combatting it is a priority. So while we wait for the government's strategy on human trafficking, these are steps that could be taken right now.

I want to conclude by congratulating all the female trailblazers for their dedication and commitment to advancing women's rights and equality. While we commemorate these efforts today and celebrate the progress we have made, International Women's Day is also a call for a commitment to see a better tomorrow.

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

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm proud to rise on behalf of the Ontario New Democratic Party caucus, the only legislative caucus in the country that has more than 50% women in its caucus, to speak on the issue of International Women's Day and to talk about women's issues in a very focused and concentrated way.

International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate and reflect on the gains that we've made together for women and girls. My colleagues actually have talked about some of those initiatives. But it's also an important time and an important opportunity to recognize how much more there is to be done towards building a province where everyone can truly share in the opportunities that we create.

As women, we need to stand in solidarity and recommit to achieving positive social change: change so that women are no longer blamed for the gender-based violence perpetrated against them; change so that women are no longer shamed and doubted when they come forward against their abusers; change so that the legal system actually protects women and doesn't revictimize them.

In Ontario in 2016, women still earn 71% of what men earn, and women are more likely to be precariously employed in this province. This inequity is disproportionately borne by racialized, indigenous and immigrant women—in 2016, Speaker.

We should never accept that any woman in Ontario has to lead her life in fear or accept fewer opportunities because of her gender. We should never accept that any woman in Ontario has to work three jobs for wages that still leave her family struggling to make ends meet. We should never accept that real action to improve the lives of women can be delayed any longer, put off for another day, another decade, another generation.

When Ontario's women succeed, we all succeed. When women and girls flourish, so do our communities. Together, we can build a province that improves the lives of women.

But the Liberal government must stop the cuts to programs like the Partner Assault Response program. They must stop ignoring the crisis of accessibility in child care, which keeps women at home and out of the workplace. They must invest in affordable, licensed child care for Ontario families. This would help women enormously, Speaker.

We can take real action on pay and employment equity if the Liberal government is willing to make it a priority. We can take real action to end precarious work. We can invest in shelters, affordable housing, transitional housing and supports for women fleeing violence. But it takes a government that's committed and willing to take real action.

We can recommit ourselves—women and men—to speak up and act to end violence against all women: straight, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or two-spirited.

By going beyond an inquiry, we can tackle the root causes of Canada's national crisis of murdered and

missing indigenous women. We know what's happening with indigenous peoples in our country and in our province. We know how many communities are on boil-water alerts; we know the lack of health care that occurs on reserves; we know the lack of quality housing that exists on reserves; we know the inability of people to provide the level of education that other children receive in this province on the reserve; and we know the challenges facing urban indigenous peoples as well. First Nations, Métis and Inuit people have not been treated well in Canada or in Ontario. Speaker, we can only change the outcomes if we change the root causes of those outcomes.

I believe that's how best to celebrate International Women's Day. We celebrate our victories and we celebrate the women upon whose shoulders we stand, while we strengthen our resolve to continue their work and achieve the dignity, safety and equality of all women.

On behalf of Ontario's New Democratic caucus, all the very best for an inspiring International Women's Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for the comments.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have many petitions that were sent in to us.

"Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

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

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Wayne Gates: "Petition to Stop the Plan to Increase Senior Drug Costs.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario will require most seniors to pay significantly more for prescription drugs, starting on April 1, 2016, under changes to the Ontario Drug Benefit plan;

"Whereas most seniors will be required to pay a higher annual deductible of $170 and a higher copayment each and every time they fill a prescription at their pharmacy; and

"Whereas the average Ontario senior requires at least eight different types of drugs each year to stay healthy and maintain their independence; and

"Whereas many seniors on fixed incomes simply cannot afford to pay more for prescription drugs and should not be forced to skip medicines that they no longer can afford and put their health in jeopardy;

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

"Stop the government plans to make most Ontario seniors pay more for necessary prescription drugs and instead work to expand prescription drug coverage for all Ontarians."

I'll sign my name—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Newmarket–Aurora.

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LUNG HEALTH

Mr. Chris Ballard: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children;

"Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths ... lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

"In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than $4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than $80 billion seven short years from now;

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

"To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry's private member's bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

"Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage."

SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas demonstration schools in Ontario provide incredible necessary support for children with special education needs;

"Whereas the current review by the government of Ontario of demonstration schools and other special education programs has placed a freeze on student intake and the hiring of teaching staff;

"Whereas children in need of specialized education and their parents require access to demonstration schools and other essential support services;

"Whereas freezing student intake is unacceptable as it leaves the most vulnerable students behind; and

"Whereas the situation could result in the closure of many specialized education programs, depriving children with special needs of their best opportunity to learn;

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

"To immediately reinstate funding streams for demonstration schools and other specialized education services for the duration of the review and to commit to ensuring every student in need is allowed the chance to receive an education and achieve their potential."

I'm pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Jessie.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a petition from the Barrie–Orillia area.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired;

"Whereas there is no known cause or cure for this devastating illness; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden rising to $15.7 billion by 2020; and

"Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges; and

"Whereas there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

"Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

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

"To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research."

I wholeheartedly agree with this. I'll give it to page—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further petitions?

LUNG HEALTH

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas lung disease affects more than 2.4 million people in the province of Ontario, more than 570,000 of whom are children;

"Of the four chronic diseases responsible for 79% of deaths (cancers, cardiovascular diseases, lung disease and diabetes) lung disease is the only one without a dedicated province-wide strategy;

"In the Ontario Lung Association report, Your Lungs, Your Life, it is estimated that lung disease currently costs the Ontario taxpayers more than $4 billion a year in direct and indirect health care costs, and that this figure is estimated to rise to more than $80 billion seven short years from now;

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

"To allow for deputations on MPP Kathryn McGarry's private member's bill, Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, which establishes a Lung Health Advisory Council to make recommendations to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care on lung health issues and requires the minister to develop and implement an Ontario Lung Health Action Plan with respect to research, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of lung disease; and

"Once debated at committee, to expedite Bill 41, Lung Health Act, 2014, through the committee stage and back to the Legislature for third and final reading; and to immediately call for a vote on Bill 41 and to seek royal assent immediately upon its passage."

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Xavier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Before I get into further petitions, I just want to remind members that if you have a lengthy petition, sometimes brevity is a sign of wisdom. I would encourage you to shorten it, if you can.

Further petitions?

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that was given to me by

JoAnne and Dan Vida, good friends of mine in the town of Ingersoll.

"Whereas the purpose of Ontario's Environmental Protection Act ... is to 'provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.' RSO 1990, c. E.19, s. 3.; and

"Whereas 'all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local ecosystem.'—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

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

"That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario."

I affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

ONTARIO NORTHLAND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

M^me^ France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over the northeast. I want to thank Mr. Rob Bailey from Hanmer in my riding. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the residents of northern Ontario, particularly people who are sick or elderly, depend on public transportation for appointments in southern Ontario;

"Whereas intercity bus routes have been eliminated by Greyhound, for example, all daytime routes between Sudbury and Ottawa" have been eliminated; and

"Whereas there have been serious reductions at Ontario Northland, including the elimination of Northland's train services;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to: Ensure that Ontario Northland offers adequate and equitable intercity transportation service from northern to southern Ontario."

I fully agree with this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Sayeem to bring it to the Clerk.

CHILD CUSTODY

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

"There is no right in law to guarantee the rights of grandparents to have a direct relationship with their grandchildren without interference;

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

"To request the Attorney General of the province of Ontario to enact laws, where in no case any person, without grave reason, interfere with the personal relationship between the child and his/her grandparents."

I agree with this and will pass it on to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital is challenged to support the growing needs of the community within its existing space as it was built for a mere 7,000" emergency department "visits each year and experiences in excess of 33,000 visits annually; and

"Whereas the government-implemented Places to Grow Act forecasts massive population growth in New Tecumseth, which along with the aging population will only intensify the need for the redevelopment of the hospital; and

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"Whereas all other hospital emergency facilities are more than 45 minutes away with no public transit available between those communities; and

"Whereas Stevenson Memorial Hospital deserves equitable servicing comparable to other Ontario hospitals;

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

"That the Kathleen Wynne Liberal government immediately provide the necessary funding to Stevenson Memorial Hospital for the redevelopment of their emergency department, operating rooms, diagnostic imaging and laboratory to ensure that they can continue to provide stable and ongoing service to residents in our area."

I agree with the petition and I will sign it.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Wayne Gates: "Nurses Know—A Petition for Better Care

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

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

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

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

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

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

"Whereas cutting skilled care means patients suffer more complicated readmissions and death;

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

"Implement a moratorium on RN cuts;

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

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

"Ensure hospitals have enough resources to continue providing safe, quality, integrated care for clinical

procedures and stop plans for moving such procedures into private, unaccountable clinics."

I fully agree with this, and I'll give this to the page.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

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

"Whereas Ontario's growing and aging population is putting an increasing strain on our publicly funded health care system; and

"Whereas since February 2015, the Ontario government has made an almost 7% unilateral cut to physician services expenditures which cover all the care doctors provide to patients; and

"Whereas the decisions Ontario makes today will impact patients' access to quality care in the years to come and these cuts will threaten access to the quality, patient-focused care Ontarians need and expect;

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

"The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care return to the table with Ontario's doctors and work together through mediation-arbitration to reach a fair deal that protects the quality, patient-focused care Ontario's families deserve."

I agree with this petition and will send it with Andrew to the Clerks' table.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

TIME ALLOCATION

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 8, 2016, on the motion for time allocation of the following bill:

Bill 173, An Act to implement Budget measures and to enact or amend various statutes / Projet de loi 173, Loi visant à mettre en oeuvre les mesures budgétaires et à édicter ou à modifier diverses lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Steve Clark: In the little bit of time I have left, I'm going to move an amendment. I move that the paragraph beginning "That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on Tuesday, March 22, 2016" be struck out and replaced with:

That the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs be authorized to meet on Tuesday, March 22, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., and Wednesday, March 23, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m., and Thursday, March 24, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. for the purpose of public hearings on the bill; and

That the committee be authorized to travel to Ottawa, Thunder Bay and London for the purpose of public hearings on the following days and times: Tuesday, March 29, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., and Wednesday, March 30, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., and Thursday, March 31, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 173:

—Notice of public hearings on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the Legislative Assembly's website and Canada NewsWire; and

—That the deadline for requests to appear be 1 p.m. on Thursday, March 17, 2016; and

—That witnesses be scheduled to appear before the committee on a first-come, first-served basis; and

—That each witness will receive up to 10 minutes for their presentation, followed by nine minutes for questions from committee members; and

—That the deadline for written submissions be 6 p.m. on Thursday, March 31, 2016; and

That the paragraphs beginning:

"That the deadline for filing amendments";

"That the committee be authorized to meet on Wednesday, April 6, 2016";

"On Thursday, April 7, 2016, at 4 p.m., those amendments";

"That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Monday, April 11, 2016"

be struck out and replaced with:

That the deadline for filing amendments to the bill with the Clerk of the Committee shall be 12 p.m. on Monday, April 4, 2016; and

That the committee be authorized to meet on Wednesday, April 13, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., and Thursday, April 14, 2016, from 9 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. for the purpose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill;

On Thursday, April 14, 2016, at 4 p.m., those amendments which have not yet been moved shall be deemed to have been moved, and the Chair of the Committee shall interrupt the proceedings and shall, without further debate or amendment, put every question necessary to dispose of all remaining sections of the bill and any amendments thereto. At this time, the Chair shall allow one 20-minute waiting period, pursuant to standing order 129(a); and

That the committee shall report the bill to the House no later than Monday, April 18, 2016. In the event that the committee fails to report the bill on that day, the bill shall be deemed to be passed by committee and shall be deemed to be reported to and received by the House; and.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Mr. Clark has presented an amendment for time allocation of Bill 173.

It states: "I move that the paragraph beginning 'That the Standing Committee on Finance'"—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Dispense? Agreed? Agreed.

Further debate on the amendment?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in the House, but today it's not an honour I particularly relish because we are speaking to an amendment on the time allocation motion on the budget.

The budget is something that affects each and every Ontarian. There are some bills that go through this House that affect one region more than another or affect one stakeholder group more than another, but the budget is pretty universal.

It's deeply, deeply troubling to have a time allocation motion on the budget, particularly from a government that claims to be open and transparent. I had the opportunity—I don't know if this was mentioned in the House before—to go to a Who concert last week—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, The Who.

There's a song with the famous Who scream, "... the new boss. Same as the old boss." That's those guys. They claim to be more open and transparent, but this time allocation motion is another obvious example. Why it's so deeply troubling, from my perspective, is because I'm the whip of the third party. Being a whip isn't like some on TV shows. It's much more mundane—much more mundane.

One purpose of the whip's office, and that we take very seriously, is to arrange to have speakers in the House at the right time for prescribed bills. We also try—I'm sure all the whips do this—to make sure that everyone who wants to speak to a bill has that opportunity; we arrange the schedule. I can assure you, Speaker, that on the budget motion—on the budget bill; I've only been here four years, and sometimes I get motions and bills confused. But I can assure you that on the budget, every one of my caucus colleagues, including the member from Nickel Belt, wanted the chance to have a full discussion—and not for their own purposes. Each one of us in my caucus—and, I'm assuming, the other caucuses as well—the caucus members go back to our ridings and we talk to people. We listen to their issues. I believe that my main job, as an MPP, is listening to people's issues at home and bringing those issues forward. And believe me, Speaker, there are lots of issues with the budget, and issues that deserve to be talked about.

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With this budget, we've already seen a rapid-fire pre-budget consultation, and the budget was released before the pre-budget consultation report was finished. So obviously, as far as an open and transparent government, that was a complete wash. Basically, they had no respect for the people who came to those deputations.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Not at all.

Mr. John Vanthof: None. Again, it's very, very troubling for a government that claims to be open and transparent.

Now we come to the budget bill. Again, every Ontarian, through their MPP, should have the ability to speak to a budget. It has already been shown that there are mistakes in the budget. The government has backed up, or is thinking about backing up. And there are many more that could be demonstrated if the government actually allowed the members of this Legislature to do their job. That's the thing with the time allocation—this motion in particular—of a budget: They're not allowing the members of the Legislature to do their job.

Furthermore, the way they're structuring these time allocation motions, they're not even allowing public deputations. They're not allowing the public to—we've seen it with the pre-budget consultations, and now, with the time allocation motions, we're seeing that they don't really want to have any—what's the word I'm looking for?

M^me^ France Gélinas: Input.

Mr. John Vanthof: Input—criticism. This government does not want criticism, even constructive criticism. They like to talk about openness and transparency, but they don't really want it pointed out that, in some cases, there are things that could be done better. That's one of the issues: They really don't like criticism. So they're doing things like time allocation.

Most people in the outside world don't have any appreciation of what time allocation means. Four years ago, before I was an MPP, I might have thought time allocation was a good thing. It sounds kind of like you're managing your time. It should be called a "cutting off debate" motion—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's actually a guillotine.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, the guillotine motion. We've heard long enough, "Off with the head of the debate."

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Remember what happened to Robespierre.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. The government is saying, "Oh, the debate is going somewhere where we don't want it to go, because we might not look so good. So, off with the debate." That's basically what a time allocation motion is. It may be good for the government of the day, but it's certainly not good for the province. It's not good for the people, particularly on something as far-reaching as the budget.

Yes, we disagree vehemently with a lot of things in the budget. The way it's supposed to work is that you identify where you can agree, you identify where you disagree, and, hopefully, you can make things work a bit better. But if you refuse to listen to the people of the province by saying, "The members can only speak for X amount of hours," you are—again the guillotine. You're saying, "That's it."

Again, we mention the way that the motion is structured. The PC amendment is structured a bit differently. But the way the government's motion is structured, it allows very little time for members of the public to make any comment in the committee process. The committee process is actually a very important process, if it's used correctly, because it gives the members of the public a chance, after they have had a chance to look at the bill, to make some informed comments. Hopefully, some of those informed comments could be put forward as amendments and the bill could be improved.

But what this government has chosen to do with the last few time allocation motions, and particularly the last

one previous to this with the PTSD bill—I forget what number it was, but a very, very important bill for those first responders and others who could be impacted by PTSD. The bill was structured so that the time when the motion was put forward to the time that you had to get on the list to be a deputant was so short that it was impossible for an Ontarian who isn't connected to a paid lobby group or deeply connected to the government to actually get on the list. That is not democracy, when there is so little time.

The way it should work, particularly on something like the PTSD bill, is that you want people in the public to be able to come forward and make a deputation. Even in this House sometimes you'll hear—obviously, you can see I'm not using speaking notes today, but a lot of people here read from speaking notes, and sometimes people will relate a life experience that they themselves have experienced. Those are actually the best ways to move policy. That's what committee hearings are for: to bring forward people who actually have had a life experience in something that is included in the bill and you think, "Wow. We never thought of that." There's no crime in not thinking of something. That's why the committee process was created. It has taken a lot of years to create our system, but that's why it was created.

It's the same with this budget process. Now that we've seen the budget, the way it should work is that there should be a fulsome debate in this House. There has always been time allocation since I've been here. I haven't been here very long, but I have been told that this House used to work without time allocation and actually the parties worked together. Sure, it was partisan, but the parties worked together. And you know what? Laws got passed, because this is a pretty great province. But no; the way it works now is that the government gets sick of constructive criticism so they just shut it off.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Never mind constructive—any criticism.

Mr. John Vanthof: Any criticism. But I prefer constructive criticism. We do our best to provide constructive criticism.

So now with the budget bill, with this time allocation motion prior to the amendment, the only thing that gives people any breathing room is that we're having a constituency week, so maybe somebody has a bit of a chance to get on the list. But if we hadn't had, by the luck of the draw—and that's all it was, the luck of the draw—a constituency week in between, it would have been the same MO: time allocation; mere hours to get on the deputant list; first-come, first-served.

The idea of first-come, first-served is also a big problem. To the people on the outside, you think, "First-come, first-served: That's the best way to do it." No. And why specifically with time allocation? Who here knows when a time allocation is coming? The government. When the government is the only one who really knows when the time allocation is coming and they put such a short window on when you can apply to be a deputant, then first-come, first-served means that, conceivably, the government can have the list packed of all the people who are in favour of whatever they are proposing.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: We would never do that.

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Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, and the government says they would never do that. Just like they say they're open and transparent; just like they told us when I first got here—remember those two gas plants they moved?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, yes.

Mr. John Vanthof: I remember sitting in my seat with them telling me it will cost the taxpayers $40 million—

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Is that all?

Mr. John Vanthof: That's all it was going to cost, and it's over $1 billion.

That's the problem. There is the possibility, in the way the government structures these time allocation motions, that they're loading the deck. They're fixing the game. They could be. They are fixing the game. If they really wanted constructive criticism, they would make sure that as many people as possible could go to these budget deputations—or any other deputation but specifically these budget deputations; that's what we're speaking to today—but they don't.

In my final couple of minutes, I'd like to speak to something about the Tory amendment. There's one part of the Tory amendment that I'm very in favour of—one part—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Which part is that?

Mr. John Vanthof: Where we actually get out of the fair city of Toronto.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Imagine that. Do you mean there's more to this province?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm very proud of Ontario, and I'm proud of Toronto. I didn't know anything about Toronto until I got this job, but it's a great city. It has a few problems, but overall, it's a great city. I'm very proud when my wife's family comes from Holland and they come to visit and we tour them over Toronto because we're proud of Toronto. It's a world city.

But the other way: Ontario isn't just Toronto. I don't know if they think that, but they keep portraying that because, every time, with these motions, they have hearings where?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Toronto.

Mr. John Vanthof: Toronto. There's a big world outside Toronto.

The people outside of Toronto have different needs than the people in Toronto. You know what? I wouldn't be comfortable either if all budget deputations were made in Temiskaming Shores.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It would be great for Temiskaming Shores.

Mr. John Vanthof: It would be great for Temiskaming Shores and great for me, but I wouldn't be comfortable because the people in Temiskaming Shores don't have the same views on urban as rural.

By the same token, it's very discomforting, when we have these important hearings—and I'm going by the

belief that they are important hearings, that the deal hasn't been fixed—that they're always held here. They should be held throughout the province because it's the diversity of the province, Speaker, that makes this province strong. The more this government ignores the diversity of this province and the diversity of the people, the weaker the future of this province is going to look.

That is one of the things why this province has got troubles: because this government continues to talk about other parts of the province but continues, in action, to ignore them. By not holding budget hearings in the rest of the province due to these time allocation motions, they are demonstrating total disregard for Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Any further debate on the amendments?

On March 8, Mr. Naqvi moved government of notice motion number 63. Mr. Clark then moved that the motion be amended as follows: "The paragraph beginning"—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Dispense.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Dispense. Agreed? Agreed.

We are now dealing with Mr. Clark's amendment to the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House that the amendment carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

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

I have just received a vote deferral from the deputy House leader.

"To the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly: Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on the amendment to the government notice of motion 63 be deferred until deferred votes on March 9, 2016."

Vote deferred.

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND LOW-CARBON ECONOMY ACT, 2016

LOI DE 2016 SUR L'ATTÉNUATION DU CHANGEMENT CLIMATIQUE ET UNE ÉCONOMIE SOBRE EN CARBONE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 7, 2016, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 172, An Act respecting greenhouse gas / Projet de loi 172, Loi concernant les gaz à effet de serre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: For those of us who are starting to feel like this is "Groundhog Afternoon," it's not.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It's John Vanthof, unplugged.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. I had the chance to start my 20-minute discussion on Bill 172, the climate change and low-carbon economy bill. In my first part, I talked about how we have been in favour of cap-and-trade for a long time. But the trick to cap-and-trade, or any carbon—

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: The way to make it work—there are three pillars that need to make this work, or probably any—the word that comes to mind is "scheme," but any—

Mr. Grant Crack: Initiative.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'll use a Liberal term—initiative. It's got to be transparent, it's got to be effective, and it's got to be fair.

Yesterday, we were talking about how we don't know whether what the government has announced on cap-and-trade—particularly how they're going to increase taxes on gas and home heating fuel—is going to be transparent. The government says it's going to go into a separate account. The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change says, "Well, no, there are regulations to stop that money from going anywhere else."

I would expect there would be regulations to stop the government from spending $1 billion to move two gas plants, but those regulations didn't seem to exist.

An example I used yesterday was, I would expect that there would have been regulations that would have stopped Ornge Air from buying motorcycles to put in their lobby—Orange County Choppers—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Powerboats, yes.

Mr. John Vanthof: Oh, and a powerboat. You would expect that there would be regulations to stop such things, but, obviously, there weren't.

So for the government to say, "Oh, no, don't worry, folks; there are regulations to stop this money from leaking anywhere else"—or from slushing anywhere else—why should people buy it? We don't. You want to make this transparent? Make it truly transparent: dollars in, dollars out—a separate account.

But I'm not going to focus on that so much as I'm going to focus more on the second and third pillars.

The second pillar is to make sure that it's effective. We hear the government saying, "We're going to get so much more money in, and then we're going to spend this money on green initiatives."

Okay, but how do we know these are effective green initiatives? How do we know exactly how much carbon these initiatives are going to take out of the system? We have seen no proof, no graphs. There must be a number: so many dollars per tonne of carbon, and if the initiative doesn't take out so many tonnes of carbon for this much money, it's not effective.

There was an announcement of a subsidy on electric cars. Great. Obviously, it's a green initiative. But have we ever seen any numbers on how much carbon this initiative is actually going to take out of the economy? No. We haven't seen that, and that's a problem. If people are going to be forced to pay to help remove carbon out of the system, they are going to need to see the proof that this carbon is actually being effectively removed with the money. What this government keeps saying is, "Oh, no, but we're only going to spend it on green initiatives." But that doesn't prove it's going to be effective.

Going back to one of my favourite subjects, those two gas plants they moved: You could say that money to

move those gas plants went to make our electricity system better, but it didn't. You could you say that because two gas plants did get moved, right? So that could be.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: A hell of a lot more money.

Mr. John Vanthof: That could be. But that doesn't mean that that was a good use of the money.

It's the same with this. You could come up with a great, big carbon-removal boondoggle that this money could go to, and it would be perfectly fine, according to the regulations, because there's nothing that says that we have to have a specific target we have to meet: this many dollars to remove this many tonnes of carbon. I don't see that anywhere. All I see is, "Trust us. We know what we're doing. Trust us. Trust us because we're the ones who came up with the energy system we have now. Trust us." And that's the problem.

Do we need to worry about carbon in our society? Of course. Do we need to put together a system to make it work? Of course. But it has to be transparent and effective—

Hon. Dipika Damerla: It's free, right?

Mr. John Vanthof: This has got nothing to do with that. It's going to cost, but you have to justify where you're spending the money, and we don't see that.

There was an announcement that there's $100 million that is going to be administered by Union Gas and Enbridge as part of this initiative. No details, no justification on how much carbon this program was actually going it take out of the system, not even any details about who would actually qualify.

Because it's being administered by two gas distributors—I've got no problem with gas distributors, but there's still a big question about whether people with oil could get the money. It was clarified—"Yes, you will be able to qualify"—but how is someone on oil or propane really going to, on a province-wide scale, deal with the program administered by a gas company? Really.

With the gas company, they'll get a little flyer with their bill: "Here's the program." Enbridge doesn't have the oil customers in their database. In my riding, maybe in the Tribune, in the Speaker and in the Northern News, there will be one ad. You know what? That isn't equal opportunity. Again, there's no proof that this program is actually going to take out carbon.

The last point in my last five minutes: This program has got to be fair. Not only that; it has to be seen as fair. The first announcement of this program is, I believe, 4.3 cents on gas, 4.7 cents on diesel, some on natural and, I'm sure, on propane. Okay. That builds up a fund. But it's also a deterrent to use gas. That's part of the program.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Tell me, how is that going to work where I live?

Mr. John Vanthof: That's the problem.

I often hear the member from Etobicoke North talking about all the great transit programs that are being developed here, and I approve. But in Timmins–James Bay, in Nickel Belt, in Timiskaming–Cochrane, we don't have an option. When the gas price goes up to help with the removal of carbon, we have no options. People who work at Walmart and have to drive 40, 50 clicks to get to their job and get back are doing their share, but see no return.

Furthermore, this government's policy on climate change—they like the big announcements. But if you actually look at what they do across the province—since I've been here for four years, we had a few things in northern Ontario that actually could be used to improve carbon. We used to have a train. The train kept cars off the road. You know what? We could have done a few changes to put a lot more people on that train. That is an initiative that would be fair for carbon capture. But what did this government do? Cancelled the train.

We were promised enhanced bus service to make up for the train. Again, we weren't talking about carbon four years ago, about that debate, but this government should have been thinking about it because they passed the first one eight years ago, I believe—the first cap-and-trade initiative. As bus routes are cancelled, you're giving people in rural Ontario, and specifically in the riding of the member from Timmins–James Bay, my riding and other areas, less options. You're talking about reducing carbon, but you're cancelling transit in parts of the province. That just doesn't make sense. That's not fair, Speaker.

We see nothing in this legislation that's actually going to make it fair for people. A lot of people in this province are having a very hard time just making ends meet. And you know what? They can't really afford to pay more for necessities. I have towns in my riding that you drive through—and I'm not going to mention which ones. You drive through and they're very friendly-looking; they're well kept. In some of those, 10% of the people go to food banks. In those towns, there is no public transportation. There's no more train. The bus service has been changed drastically.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I thought it was going to be enhanced.

Mr. John Vanthof: They can't pay anymore. I see nothing in this legislation—and this does exist in other provinces and other legislation—that tries to make it fair. We see nothing in this legislation that does that.

In my last little while, I want to talk about two parts of this province that could do a big change for climate change. One is forestry. Growing trees are carbon sinks.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But they're not counted in cap-and-trade.

Mr. John Vanthof: They're not counted in cap-and-trade.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Go figure that one.

Mr. John Vanthof: And you know what? Cut more trees, use more wood and plant more trees. That's one way, and that should be counted.

The last one near and dear to my heart is agriculture. Agriculture, right now, is—not according to the Environmental Commissioner—releasing carbon and it actually could be a carbon sink. Farmers would be very willing to help with that, but we have to be very careful that under

this initiative or scheme the people who are helping actually get some benefit, that it doesn't just become a big cap-and-trade market in the sky for aggregators and Bay Street—kind of like our investments, they go up and down and Bay Street makes money, but we don't—because then it won't work. It has to be fair for the people who are paying; it has to be fair for the people who can help, like farmers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I found the contribution made by the member to be very useful to the debate. As I say, I'm very pleased to see the that New Democratic Party in principle is in support of this legislation. I am intrigued and made happy by the fact that the official opposition, the Progressive Conservative Party, has decided that it too now is in favour of a carbon tax, as they would call it.

As I think I mentioned in the House yesterday—I wasn't sure if you were there, so I would share it with you now: The biblical road to Damascus is full of converts, I can tell you that. It's great to see the conversion taking place.

The member for Peterborough said to me, "I felt a tremor," so I phoned Environment Canada and indeed there was a 6.5 Richter scale report in Ottawa. I think it was the members of the Conservative Party in Ottawa falling off their chairs when the leader announced that. You probably didn't, Mr. Speaker, because you're neutral as the Speaker, but the rest of the party seemed to fall off their chairs when, having said earlier in the day that all the policy will come from the grassroots, they pronounced that in fact now the official opposition is in favour of a carbon tax. But I'm pleased by that. I think the member who spoke for the New Democratic Party is pleased by that.

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I think it's good to have a fulsome debate on this particular issue. It is an interesting issue. We all want to achieve a goal of ensuring that our environment is well protected, and the member has indicated his support for that. I certainly agree that there is always room for further opinion and debate in trying to make a bill even stronger. That's why I think a debate of this kind is very useful.

I want to compliment you on the excellent job you're doing in the chair, by the way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Further questions or comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I certainly can't follow that exhortation, and I wouldn't try. I was looking around to see if any colleagues wanted to speak. I don't know of anyone who fell off the chair in Ottawa, so I'll get up and speak. I certainly didn't fall off the chair.

Anyway, I do want to commend the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane on his remarks. I think he covered a number of areas that are important, whether it's agriculture or forestry for carbon sinks etc. There is a great deal of concern out there about this $1.9 billion or $2 billion that will be dragged in, so to speak, from consumers through this carbon tax.

One tangible way that they could make a real change in the environment and climate change is a bill being debated tomorrow in committee, Bill 76. It's a private member's bill. It talks about how we would encourage the use of liquid natural gas to power vehicles on our highways.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Whose bill is that?

Mr. Robert Bailey: That bill would be in the name of Mr. Bailey.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, I know him.

Mr. Robert Bailey: You've got to promote yourself.

To get back to the bill, it would actually do what the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane talked about. It would reduce carbon and improve the environment. Less than 3% of the traffic on the roads is large trucks, but they contribute—the jury is still out on this—somewhere between 20% and 30% of the carbon footprint—greenhouse gases—to the environment. If we went to liquid natural gas—it's positive; it's being done in Quebec and it's being done in the States—we could contribute very significantly to the reduction of greenhouse gases in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Despite the temptation to politicize the issue, I just can't do it because it is so, so important.

I think I'm a Gen Xer, if I fit in that category—I was born in 1977; I'm 38 years old. I want to tell my colleagues in the House—

Interjections.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: It's pretty young, I know, and I feel great.

My generation is tired of burning fossil fuels for our energy. We're tired of pumping gas into our vehicles knowing that at the same time we go from point A to point B we are polluting; we're killing the environment.

What we need is leadership at all levels—provincial, federal and international leadership. We've seen that come out of the Paris climate talks. The aspirational goal of limiting greenhouse gas emissions to 1.5 degrees on average across the planet has to happen.

Inherent in that goal is a massive transformation of our economic system. This is not simply about implementing levies on emitters; this is about a societal and economic shift only parallel to the challenges we faced as a planet in World War I and World War II. This is our generation's war, and it should be viewed as such.

The bill put forward, Bill 172, has to be collaborative. These ideas that will make up a functional mechanism to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and essentially save the planet have to be well thought out, they have to be well nuanced, they have to be consulted upon, they have to be fair, they have to be transparent and they have to be effective. That's what we're calling for. That's what we will work toward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm pleased to be able to rise in response to the remarks from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane.

It wasn't something that we were necessarily expecting this week, that we might be approaching something close to consensus and unanimity in this chamber around this issue. That's a very welcome development.

The provisions within the bill that's before us talk to a carbon cap-and-trade system, which we know is an effective mechanism that other jurisdictions have used. We know that in other jurisdictions, a pure carbon tax or carbon pricing mechanism isn't actually working as well as the cap-and-trade mechanism.

I do welcome many of the suggestions made by the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. Very well-thought-out, reasonable questions are being put forward, and we will debate them today. I'm sure that in his party we'll have unanimous support. In the official opposition, I suppose maybe there will be a free vote so that those members who support this can and those who do not will be able to voice their views on it, because clearly that's still a work in progress there, Mr. Speaker.

But this bill does move Ontario much further ahead than we have been. As has been laid out in another bill that's before the House that speaks to how some of the proceeds from a cap-and-trade system could be spent to benefit individual Ontarians and Ontario as a whole through the creation of additional infrastructure, public transit that takes people off the roads, reduces greenhouse gases, allows Ontarians to retrofit their homes to be more energy-efficient, reduce their heating bills and reduce greenhouse gas emissions—that's all here before us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now back to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his final comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to acknowledge the Chair of Cabinet, the member from Sarnia–Lambton, my colleague from Essex and the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for their remarks. I hope that with this initiative we actually can have a fulsome debate and actually debate all of the issues—because this is a serious issue—and that we don't all of a sudden get time allocation. We need to get this right. We need to make sure that the money collected actually goes into programs that are transparent, that are effective and fair.

"Effective" is probably the most important of the three. We can all think of programs that sounded good in the press release and, quite frankly—and I know from a farmer's perspective—didn't work in the field. We can never afford to do that, but certainly with this issue we can't afford to do that.

There are ideas on all sides that could make this initiative work. There are ideas in other jurisdictions—not just Quebec and California but other jurisdictions—that actually could make this work. It's our sincere hope that the government actually takes the time to make a program that works as opposed to making a program that's got lots of initial fancy press releases and turns out to be a bitter pill for many people in this great province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I'm now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than 6.5 hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise. Deputy House leader?

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, it's an important debate. The government wishes this debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to make it be known that I'll be sharing my time today with the member for Halton, the member for Newmarket–Aurora and the member for Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

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Mr. Speaker, we all know that fighting climate change is a collective action problem. It has been recognized for years at the international level that deep cuts in global emissions are required to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. The environmental impact of our economic actions needs to be properly accounted for and reflected in the production process.

I am proud of Ontario's leadership in the fight against climate change and the move toward a low-carbon economy. Electricity and heat generation, or stationary energy, as it's known, is the largest source of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, making up nearly half at 46%. Recognizing this, Ontario took a bold step to completely eliminate smog-producing coal as an energy source. This has been the single largest climate action change in North America, and it has resulted in cleaner air for Ontarians and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to historically low levels. This action is the equivalent of taking the emissions of approximately seven million cars off our roads and saving $4 billion in annual health care and environmental costs, preventing 668 premature deaths per year.

The recent landmark Paris agreement means that economies everywhere are now scrambling to catch up with us. As other jurisdictions work to eliminate their coal dependence and look at the renewable technologies Ontario businesses are pioneering, we are taking the next steps by introducing a cap-and-trade program that will reduce greenhouse gas pollution and foster a more innovative and dynamic economy. Simply put, a green, low-carbon economy is the future, and we need to act to take strategic and innovative actions and continue to lead the process.

In the past few years, there has been a significant adoption of carbon pricing in other jurisdictions. According to the World Bank's 2015 State and Trends of Carbon Pricing report, approximately 40 nations and 23 other jurisdictions have now implemented or have scheduled prices on carbon. These systems cover 12% of

annual greenhouse gas emissions, a threefold increase over the past decade, and have a value of just under US$50 billion in 2015, $34 billion of which is from emissions trading systems. Recent major entrants include Korea's cap-and-trade program, which entered into force on January 1, 2016.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: Korea.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: That's right, folks, Korea.

China, the world's fastest-growing major economy, recently announced it will implement a national cap-and-trade program in 2017, building off of the seven regional pilot programs that have been operating since 2013-14. Closer to home, Manitoba has announced its intention to implement a cap-and-trade program and link it with Ontario, Quebec and California under the Western Climate Initiative.

I want to emphasize that every jurisdiction that has introduced carbon pricing has seen economic growth. During the past two years, California's overall economic growth was higher than the national average, and the state's green economy grew even faster. California added 491,000 jobs, which was a 3.3% growth, compared to the national average growth rate of 2.5%. Overall, California's economy produced approximately 6.6% less greenhouse gas emissions for every dollar of GDP in 2013.

Mr. Speaker, inaction on climate change is not an option. The costs are far too great. We have already seen an increase in extreme weather incidents, which have devastating impacts for individuals and our economy as a whole. Without immediate action, we can expect that insurance and repair costs will only increase with the degradation of our environment. We need a long-term framework for climate action, and Bill 172 will do just that. Every dollar from the cap-and-trade program, estimated initially at $1.9 billion, will be invested in green projects and programs, such as alternative energy, conservation and transit infrastructure.

I am so proud to say that my community of Kingston and the Islands recognizes the need for opportunities for a low-carbon economy. The city of Kingston has committed to becoming the most sustainable city in Canada, and with the help of our local partners, such as Utilities Kingston, Sustainable Kingston and Switch, we are well on our way.

The Minister of Energy was just in Kingston yesterday to recognize the community as a leader in conservation. There are so many initiatives already under way, such as the Kingston community energy plan project and Green Economy Kingston, to help residents, businesses and our local economy reduce costs, grow our competitive advantage through sustainability and build on the success of the many clean energy opportunities in place in our community.

I'm happy to support Bill 172 for the sake of our environment, our economy and the future of our children and grandchildren. Merci beaucoup. Meegwetch.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Halton.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'd like to thank the member from Kingston and the Islands for her thoughtful comments just now.

I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 172, our government's new stand-alone bill on climate change. I am proud that Minister Murray and this government have put forward the Climate Change Mitigation and Low-carbon Economy Act. This legislation is a long-term investment in the future of our province and our children. If we want the next generation to inherit a safe and healthy Ontario, then we have to act now.

Let's talk a little bit about the effects of climate change. The effects of climate change are far-reaching. It affects our personal health. It affects our water resources, our wildlife and ecosystems. It affects our life, the lives of our friends and neighbours, and the lives of our children.

In my riding of Halton, I'm proud to say that we have many businesses and community leaders who understand the importance of tackling climate change. Halton is agriculturally diverse, and we must take the necessary steps to protect and maintain it. For example, the Halton Environmental Network highlights green businesses and organizations in and around my riding, and makes sensible decisions and encourages those decisions with our planet's future in mind. Organizations such as MiltonGreen focus their time on encouraging companies and individuals to think of the environment first. In fact, both groups have spoken to me about climate change.

While groups such as these are already doing important work, it is crucial that we do our part. The world's leading scientists are urging governments to act quickly to limit global warming, and our government is listening. In fact, our position has always been clear. There has been no flip-flopping on this side of the House.

Bill 172 sets a long-term framework for climate action. It helps fight against climate change by giving polluters an important incentive to cut greenhouse gas emissions. This bill would implement a cap-and-trade system then reinvest the proceeds into green projects and initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. In this new carbon market, companies would have real incentive to reduce harmful emissions and invest in cleaner technologies. By capping the amount of allowable emissions, companies would either have to lower their output or buy carbon credits from someone who did. As more and more businesses move toward cleaner production, the cap on emissions would be reduced each year; just think about that.

Why are we doing this? Because everyone wins. The result would be a cleaner environment and increased investment in clean technology, innovation and jobs, and a stronger future for our children. This bill takes an approach to tackling climate change that has been proven in both California and Quebec. The approach is one that we know is winning there. The province is working closely with these jurisdictions to link our carbon market with theirs. By doing so, Ontario will gain access to the largest carbon market in North America; there is no

doubt in my mind that this will be an asset to our province.

In addition to implementing the cap-and-trade program, this bill reinforces the government's existing climate change action plan.

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Bill 172 will reaffirm emission reduction targets and provide accountability by publishing action plans and progress reports. This bill ensures that our government has a well-thought-out plan.

Mr. Speaker, good climate policy is good economic policy and good people policy. The time to act is now. The future of our children depends on it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now recognize the member from Newmarket–Aurora.

Mr. Chris Ballard: I have listened thoughtfully to the concerns of the members for Halton and Kingston and the Islands, as I have to the rest of the members who have spoken here today about this most important and very crucial legislation. What I'd like to do for the few minutes I have is just focus on a couple of areas and maybe a bit more of an upbeat take on what is happening here.

I wanted to start off by agreeing that this is the battle of our generation and that we certainly have to do something about greenhouse gas emissions. This is not something we can put off for another year or another 10 years. The time is now to take some pretty drastic and some pretty important steps to begin to address the major concerns. But what I've noticed out there is that there has been, we'll say, a bit of greenhouse gas burnout with some individuals; people are feeling a bit overwhelmed and perhaps a bit pessimistic that anything could be done.

I was delighted to see that 10 years after publishing his documentary, An Inconvenient Truth, Al Gore has stepped forward this past month—I think it was about February 16—and put on a 22-minute Ted Talk that you can find on the Ted Talk website. I believe it was in Vancouver, actually. The first half of his discussion is the usual introduction to greenhouse gas issues and carbon issues and the dire consequences if we don't act, but what's interesting is the second half of his documentary. It's very positive. Al Gore now believes we can beat this. We have to work at it, and there will be some major issues that we deal with, but we can now beat this. He looks, for example, at the implementation of modern technology like the uptake of LED lighting and the number of coal-fired plants around the world that are being cancelled—new ones being cancelled; old ones being shuttered.

It's a very optimistic, or far more optimistic, view about the world than he had 10 years ago. I would commend anyone who is feeling a bit burned out and overwhelmed to see what Al Gore has to say, and they'll feel a lot more positive.

When it comes to our piece of legislation, I'm hearing wonderful agreement about the need to deal with carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, and that's absolutely wonderful. It's wonderful to hear about the conversion on the road to Damascus from a few members opposite, that they're now on board and agreeing that it is a problem.

We have to talk about solutions. When I first looked at possible solutions, I heard what our minister had to say, I heard what others had to say and, frankly, I did a lot of my own research and my own reading, and talked to a lot of the experts I know who live in my riding. I agree with our government's position that cap-and-trade really offers a very exciting opportunity for business and for individuals. This is an opportunity like we haven't seen before to not only do the right thing but to build a green economy.

I know there are concerns, and I was glad to see in legislation that all of those funds collected must be spent on projects that reduce our carbon footprint. I was very happy to see that. But what happened when we started talking about cap-and-trade in my riding was the number of companies that came to see me. Some of them are start-ups; some of them are multi-billion-dollar institutions right now. All of them are working on solutions that would really benefit from cap-and-trade. Not only are they doing the right thing for the right reasons; they're also doing things that create jobs and create investments in my riding and in Ontario. I think they are the embodiment of some of the positive things that will happen as we move into cap-and-trade and use that system to stimulate a green economy and to make sure that not only do we fix the problem, but, at the end of the day, that Ontario's economy is much stronger.

I know there are a lot of things that the province will be doing. My time has pretty much run out. I just wanted to leave us on a more optimistic perspective in terms of good things that are being done, and there are more things coming.

I will turn the floor over to the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell to finish up on our side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: What an honour it is for me to rise this afternoon and represent the great people of the riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell. It's not an easy task to follow the member from Kingston and Islands, the member from Halton and especially the member from Newmarket–Aurora, but I'll do my best.

I was really proud last March to be able to put forward a motion in this House on March 12—as a matter of fact, almost one year ago today—just asking the House to recognize that climate change was real. At that time, during my 12-minute presentation, I had a quote from David Suzuki from his website. He stated, "The debate is over about whether or not climate change is real." That proved to be the case, as the entire House here actually supported the motion that I put forward. I had the privilege of having a press conference with the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change that morning, which went very well.

I wanted to bring up some comments, perhaps, that the critic of the environment portfolio from the opposition had stated in her response. She said, "I have to be clear in

stating that implementing a carbon tax does not achieve" the goals related to carbon reduction. All of a sudden, we hear that the Leader of the Opposition now is saying, "We have to do something about it, and that something includes putting a price on carbon." So there has been a change of heart on the other side. That's why I put forward the motion, to begin talking about this important issue, and it's good to see that all members of the House specifically speak in favour of what we're attempting to do.

I can understand the concerns that the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane mentioned in his address. He's concerned about transparency. I think we've pretty well made it clear; the Minister of the Environment will speak on this some more, I'm sure. It's right in our budget, on page 27, what we're going to be doing and what the impacts are going to be. We're saying that there is going to be an impact on the cost of gas across the province of about 4.3 cents per litre. We know that there's going to be an impact on natural gas of about $5 per household. It's right there. That's transparent.

We've also committed to reinvesting some of the funds that we're going to receive into my favourite, the $100-million retrofit program for homeowners. We'll be able to take advantage of a program that they've been asking for for years, that I could have benefited from, that people I know could have benefited from over the years had our government of the day taken this initiative.

I'm very proud that our government and our minister have taken leadership on this particular file. It's not easy, Speaker. Nobody wants to pay more for gas. Nobody wants to pay more for natural gas. That's just normal. But it's great to see there is a consensus here that we have to do something, that the people of Ontario respect the fact that we're all going to have to contribute in doing our part and showing that leadership in reducing the impacts of climate change that I know are going to impact rural Ontario, our agricultural community and our business community to an extent that we don't really comprehend at this particular point.

I want to thank you for the privilege of speaking today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

1700

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I just want to make a quick comment on some of the presentations that were made.

I want to say from the outset that yes, climate change is real and yes, we need to do something about it. The challenge we have here is that this bill talks more about the money we're going to collect than the things we're going to do to actually reduce the carbon footprint in our province.

We're told that this is all covered in bill whatever-it-is in the budget and this is how we're going to do it. I've been around here long enough, Speaker, to realize that the first budget that this government—under a different leader, but this government—came out with, they were going to collect a health tax and they were going to put it all into health care. But where did it go? The first thing we heard, it was grants given to infrastructure. When they were questioned about, "Well, how do you put a health tax into building infrastructure?", they were very clear about it: "Of course, clean water is important for good health, so that money is going to health care."

This is the type of thing that I think we, on this side of the House, worry about: $1.9 billion a year that they're going to put in the kitty. They're going to, as we just heard from the member opposite, put some of that into trying to reduce carbon. The rest of it is going into the slush fund that they're going to spend on whatever they see fit, and I think that's wrong.

Now, the other part about reducing the carbon footprint: I know the people in my riding now are not purchasing gas because they want to go places; they're purchasing gas because they have to go places. Do you believe, Mr. Speaker, that they're going to purchase less gas because they have to pay another 4.3 cents on that litre? No, they're not going to purchase less gas. They're going to purchase less of other things, things they can't pay for anymore because of the high hydro rates and the extra money they have to pay on gas. None of that will help the carbon footprint that we have. That's what I think is wrong with this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: In the interest of transparency, let me just focus in on one aspect of the bill, and that's that the government wants to appoint a private agency to oversee the implementation of the cap-and-trade initiative.

Now, we saw that when they started selling the shares of Ontario Hydro, by putting it into private hands, they took away any oversight that we used to have from the Auditor General, from the Financial Accountability Officer, from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. They have no oversight now on Hydro One—none at all.

That's what's going to happen when they have this private panel to oversee this cap-and-trade initiative. That's the wrong way to go about it. You should change that. I mean, the bill has a strong foundation, but it needs to be changed. You can't have a private panel. You have to have public access to that information. The public needs to know how much money is being collected, where it's being spent on climate change initiatives, what impact it's having and are there other things we can do? You have to justify to the people who are paying that extra price at the pump that this is a public document overseen by the legislative experts, the people we pay for accountability in this House: the Auditor General, the Financial Accountability Officer and the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

I heard the member from Newmarket–Aurora just talk about LED lighting. I have nothing against LED lighting. I'll just mention that, recently, in Windsor there was an accident. A school bus went through a red light because snow had plugged up the red light so it was blocking it,

because LED lighting doesn't emit enough heat to melt the snow when it lands on the traffic light.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank my colleagues this afternoon who made a significant contribution to the debate: the members from Kingston and the Islands, Halton, Newmarket–Aurora and Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

I think it's quite true that all 107 members of this Legislature now realize and have come to understand that climate change is, indeed, a serious problem. I know that in my own community of Peterborough, in 2002 and 2004 we had two 100-year storms within a two-year period. That's a good indicator. Whether you look at Calgary, whether you look at all communities in North America that have seen violent weather conditions that have wreaked havoc on their respective communities, they know that climate change is indeed very real.

The challenge for all of us today is to move from a disaster management perspective to a disaster prevention perspective in terms of climate change, equipping our municipalities—rural municipalities and larger urban municipalities—to make sure that they have the tools in place to deal with what might come down the road in terms of climate change. So we look at the proceeds from the auction to reinvest into a wide variety of initiatives—and 100% of those proceeds will be reinvested.

But I want to talk about agriculture for half a minute. Agriculture represents about 6% of the GHGs in the province of Ontario but has a unique opportunity to punch well beyond its weight in terms of climate change. If you look at carbon sequestration, we're into a process right now of soil management—my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—the four-plan review and the GreenUP, all very positive initiatives to allow us, particularly in terms of preservation of farmland and other initiatives, to really have agriculture in the forefront when it comes to the battle against climate change.

Mr. Speaker, we are all in this together, and it appears that there might be a consensus forming in this Legislature to address this with very positive, responsible legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments? The member from Lanark, Addington, Lennox, Frontenac and—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: And whatever else is out there.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): —other parts unknown.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, I just want to comment on two explicit points that were raised by the Liberals as they shared their 20 minutes. They couldn't find 20 minutes for one person to speak about the bill; they had to share it up between four.

The first one was by the member from Newmarket–Aurora, and this is insightful to what is really behind this bill. He said that this bill creates exciting opportunities for business—exciting opportunities for business. He didn't talk about greenhouse and climate change; he talked about exciting opportunities. This is what we often see with Liberal bill:, that they're rigged—rigged—to provide benefits to a few people at the cost of a great many people. So I'd like to see if the member from Newmarket–Aurora will get up and just tell us exactly what businesspeople in Newmarket–Aurora are going to benefit from this hocus-pocus bill they have in front of the House today.

The other one, Speaker, was the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, and his comments were insightful as well. He said, "We will reinvest some of this money." Okay, $1.9 billion in new revenues for this government, and the member from GPR says, "We'll reinvest some of this money." I guess all the rest of it will go over to the member from Newmarket–Aurora's friends in business in his riding or elsewhere—other Liberal members who will enjoy and reap the benefits of this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Newmarket–Aurora for his final comments.

Mr. Chris Ballard: It's my pleasure just to make a few final comments. It's so refreshing to hear, Mr. Speaker, all parties agree that climate change is real, that excess carbon in the atmosphere is the reason and that that excess carbon is there because of things that we as the human species have done in the past, especially the past 75 or 80 years. It's now refreshing to hear that there needs to be a tax on carbon and that we have agreement with members opposite for that.

I've often wondered, Mr. Speaker—we pay, as citizens, to dump our pollution in lakes when we flush our toilets, or whatever goes down our sinks and enters the water stream. We pay to have that cleaned and put into the water. But we think that we have a free ride when we put pollution in the form of carbon into the atmosphere, something that we all breathe. It's about time, Mr. Speaker, and the time has arrived, that we understand that that form of pollution, carbon pollution, is one that we have to deal with, and deal with right now.

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But I just wanted to talk about the economy and cap-and-trade for a second. I had an interesting conversation with an economist from California who talked about the pace of growth of the California economy when their cap-and-trade was put in place, and it has exceeded the growth across the United States. It's phenomenal, and it is directly tied to the beginnings of cap-and-trade. In fact, the number of jobs in California grew by 3.3% when the national average was only 2.5%. So there are a lot of positive benefits to this piece of legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much, Speaker, for getting all those words strung together in just the right way.

Last week, I was in this House speaking about the budget, and I referenced a column by Jack Mintz, who

suggested that politicians were rigging the system. I don't know if anybody remembers that debate, but that's what he called it, that politicians were rigging the playing field for their friends, for their business partners, such as the member from Newmarket–Aurora, at the expense and to the detriment of people who actually vote and who we're actually elected to represent. I see Bill 172 as just a furtherance of this rigging.

This is really a bill that attempts to use stealth to hide the Liberals from the outrage from the people of Ontario, and they are using the language of the environment to camouflage this attempt to cover up their budget shortcomings, their malfeasance, their mismanagement, their scandals. That's what this bill is all about. It's a purposeful camouflaging of their failings, using environmental language.

Speaker, they call it cap-and-trade. We know cap-and-trade has two parts to it. It's like any other ledger, any other balance sheet: There's a give and take. This bill only has a take. That's all it does: It takes from people. It doesn't have that corresponding offset to it. As I said earlier, the member from GPR said we're going to reinvest "some of" the money. How little? Well, only time will tell.

But the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane said in his debate about not recognizing the carbon offsets and the carbon capture that's happening, and truly, if this was a legitimate cap-and-trade program, it would be looking at the carbon capture that's already here in this province. To not look at the carbon capture, then it is only a cap-and-take program that this Liberal government is offering.

Let me just give you an example.

Ontario's greenhouse gases in 2013 were 11 megatonnes. I think even the Minister of the Environment could check his Twitter account and see if my numbers are correct on that, but 11 megatonnes. There are 85 billion trees in Ontario. According to Trees for the Future, a reputable source, each tree's annual carbon offset is 22 kilograms. That equals 1,870,000,000,000 kilograms, or 1,870 megatonnes of carbon capture: 170 times more than our emissions. So why is this government not looking at what is really happening in this province? Why are they not looking at that side of the balance sheet, that side of the ledger, and creating that as an offset?

Well, they can't take money from those ones. They can't capture any more revenue, and that's really what this is. It's not about carbon capture; it's about capturing more money.

I think, Speaker, we can see that, right now, the people of Ontario are paying about $2.4 billion a year in taxes on our gasoline. Ostensibly, that is to improve our roads, our highways and our public transit. But we've seen our gridlock continue to get worse and worse and worse under this Liberal government, adding to those emissions. They have never—never—spent the money that they're collecting already in these gas taxes, in a meaningful manner, to improve transportation and public transportation in this province.

Now they're asking us to believe, "Hold on. We've got $2.4 billion that we're taking from people. We're going to take another $1.9 billion this time. But trust us this time. We are going to invest in public transit with this new $1.9-billion scheme." This is a bill of hocus-pocus and rigging of the playing field. We've seen this play time and time again—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Same old Tory story,

Mr. Randy Hillier: —and I want to just put it in this analogy for the people, especially the member for St. Catharines; he might be able to recognize analogies. The floor price keeps rising with this Liberal government, but the ceiling remains the same. They continue to squeeze everybody.

Just to give that in relation: From the budget numbers themselves, during the life of this Liberal government, our per capita individual income in this province has been pretty stagnant. It has risen by 16% over the last 13 years. During that same period of time, the per capita debt that this government has incurred on behalf of the people has risen by 44%. The ceiling stays the same; the debt and the floor prices and the cost of living and the cost of doing business keep going up, and people keep getting squeezed.

Now all we have to do is trust them this time. This time, they're going to invest the money wisely. They're not going to be involved in scandals such as Ornge air ambulance. They're not going to be involved in scandals such as MaRS or OLG or eHealth or gas plants. They're all better. They've had an epiphany on their road to Damascus, that they are now going to be stewards of our financial house.

Well, Speaker, some people may buy that story; I certainly don't buy it. We've seen what happened with the European cap-and-trade program. We saw the fraud, the corruption and the malfeasance that happened in Europe when government and politicians got into the business of creating carbon credits and by having their friends and their business partners in Newmarket–Aurora be involved in public policy. We see what happened there: fraud, corruption and scandal.

Now, nobody would ever believe that would be possible with this Liberal government, right? They are lily-white, if not lime green. They've certainly got to be lily-white in their purity of intentions and objectives.

So $1.9 billion: That's the cost of this rigging of the playing field, once again. This stealth camouflage of their true purpose with this environmental language—Speaker, I don't buy it. It's not a cap-and-trade; as I said at the beginning, it's a cap-and-take—cap-and-take and very, very little. I'm sure in a year or two or three from now, we'll be looking at the public accounts once again, and everybody will be aghast and astonished that all this money that was taken from people didn't buy us one new bus, didn't buy us one new LRT, didn't do anything other than curry favour with some business partners and friends who can spend $5,000 or $6,000 to go to the Hyatt hotel and have dinner with the Minister of Energy and the Premier. That's where we see the real actions of this government.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the Minister of the Environment on a point of order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: That is far outside parliamentary language. We're ascribing motives and I think suggesting corruption, which is not parliamentary, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'm listening closely and I didn't see the tie-in.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I accept the minister of hocus-pocus's argument.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now I will ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I withdraw.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Questions and comments?

M^me^ France Gélinas: It is always entertaining to listen to the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington. He is very good on his feet and very interesting to listen to. Although I don't fully agree with his position on this bill, I do share some of his worries.

I spent two very painful years of my life looking at Ornge, looking at something that was supposed to be so good for our province. Ontario was the best with air ambulance and, under this government's watch, with an accountability agreement, with all of the power in the world to look at how the money was spent, they looked the other way while Dr. Mazza got paid $4 million. They looked the other way while a motorcycle was being bought with taxpayers' money. They looked the other way while powerboats were being bought with taxpayers' money. They looked the other way while this agency was being driven into the ground until there was nothing but ashes left.

When he says that he's worried that this $1.9 billion that the government is going to collect is not going to have the right amount of oversight, transparency and accountability to make sure that the good people of Ontario get value for their money, I sort of know where he's coming from.

Those two years looking at Ornge opened my eyes to the ways that I never thought things like this were happening right here in Ontario. How could it be that all you have to do is put a Liberal-friendly guy in front of the parade? It doesn't matter if the whole house is on fire; they see a Liberal-friendly guy at the front and they say, "All is good. Keep on going, my son. You're doing great."

This is what happened at Ornge. I don't want this to happen with cap-and-trade. I want it to succeed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'll try not to join the race to the bottom here.

It's interesting: If you read the Financial Accountability Officer's review of this, he's endorsed it. He's very clear, because we have taken the decision to use a regulatory fee that puts very severe restrictions on what this money can be spent on. Our standards are higher than even the well-recognized markets in Quebec and California, which were recognized by the World Bank and IMF as some of the most credible in the world, with the best oversight. We have a free-standing market.

We have a separate account, so everything is very auditable, reviewed by the Auditor General. The money comes in; the money goes out. We have also set a very high standard in the legislation in the action plans. We not only have to show where the dollars are going; we have to demonstrate what the estimated greenhouse gas reductions will be.

And actually, money can't be spent on things like transit; you could not go out and buy diesel buses if you couldn't, for example, demonstrate there was a GHG reduction. One of the things we understand, with 35% of our emissions coming from transportation and about 20% from housing—which is where our emissions are growing; they're down in energy and they're down in industry—if we don't get significant reductions there, then that burden passes to someone else.

This is also regulated independently. When we link our markets with Quebec and California, we will get a lower price because we have a larger market, it's more stable and we have the capital. To maintain investor confidence, you have to make sure there is integrity in the system. We watched very carefully the market, only a week ago, in Quebec and how that goes.

It makes us the fifth-largest economy in the world in that linked market. It also opens up incredible opportunities for Ontario companies to sell their reductions, when they get reductions, and, in the short term, they have a large, stable pool to buy allowances in. That's what the trade part is, and that keeps costs down.

When I get a chance to speak later, I'll get into more detail.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to comment on the remarks from the member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington and also Nickel Belt.

I'm very interested in the carbon sink. I've got to get the numbers from him later about how much forests and trees absorb—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Tell us about your bill.

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'm going to get to that. The member from St. Catharines just asked me to talk about my bill. I wasn't going to bring it up. I thought that would be self-promotion, but now that he's raised the issue, I'll have to.

I was interested in the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change when he talked about being able to use some of these fees that will be collected to help industry convert their vehicles. In my bill, Bill 76, LNG-powered vehicles, there would be an opportunity—as he said, transportation is an area where greenhouse gases are increasing, and maybe the biggest share on the road is coming out of heavy vehicles.

We already know that a number of municipalities have switched to compressed natural gas for garbage vehicles. I think the next step is either for marine traffic and for rail to get rid of dirty diesel, and also for the truck traffic to go to some form of liquid natural gas. The bill I have, by coincidence, before committee tomorrow for hearings would do a lot of that, so I'm interested in finding out some more about how those—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The best House leader ever, the member from Simcoe–Grey, got that on the agenda again.

That bill would actually do something where it would have a direct impact on reducing those greenhouse gases. I'm hoping, as we go forward and debate that bill and other debates here in the House, that's something the government might consider. It's a tangible area where we could actually reduce greenhouse gases. It works in Quebec right now in transport, it's working in the United States, and I think we need to bring it to Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I don't think that I've been involved in a more important debate in this House since I was elected. This is transformative stuff. This is incredibly complex. Although the member from Lanark-Frontenac may be entertaining, this is not something to joke about; I'm sorry.

Frankly, generations are relying on us on get it right, and the government has to acknowledge its past indiscretions, its past failures, its past missed opportunities to consult, to work—

Interjection.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: And it's all good, but you have to show a different path here. We have to get it right the first time.

This will not be a panacea. The minister knows that. This is but one tool that jurisdictions need to combat climate change and to save the planet. But it is incredibly complex.

The minister referenced the Financial Accountability Office, an office that we're proud, as New Democrats, to have brought into this place. The officer says that he can't tell whether the government will spend cap-and-trade revenue on new greenhouse gas reduction initiatives. The FAO says that the government might swap the money with existing program funding in order to free up cash for something else. You have to clarify that for us.

It has to be transparent. You're not going to get buy-in from industry, from the public—and you know that public sentiment out there right now is truly not on your side because of your past indiscretions. There certainly is a recognition that we have to do something for climate change, but if your government is at the wheel and they see it veering off, they're not going to buy in.

So take all of our advice. Don't do what you think is right; do what we know can work. There are places around the planet that we can point to that have made advancements on similar-type systems.

Here's one, Minister: There's no requirement that the minister refer to the internationally accepted methodologies for calculating and reporting emissions developed by the IPCC. We've got to at least adhere to the methodologies that are globally recognized.

1730

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now back to the member from Lanark-Frontenac-Addington and Lennox, and not necessarily in that order, for final comments.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to thank the members from Sarnia–Lambton, Nickel Belt, Windsor-Essex and, of course, our esteemed minister for joining into the comments.

Listen, I have a lot of respect for the Minister of the Environment. I'd like to have a little fun as well, but I do have a lot of respect for him. When he does stand in this House—and I know he's honourable and has noble intentions—and comments, I know that some people think that there's this green halo that is over him and this brilliant white aura of purity that comes from the Liberal cabinet. I just don't see it. Maybe my glasses need to be cleaned up a little bit. I don't see that aura quite as members on the Liberal backbench see that green halo that is cast over the minister.

I do find it interesting that it's parliamentary to refer to the bill as hocus-pocus; that's ok. But, of course, we have to be cautious when we talk about the author of the hocus-pocus. The bill, as I stated, is a cap-and-take. It takes from people. It takes and takes and provides little in return. It doesn't recognize those offsets, and I think it needs to if it's going to be a true cap-and-trade, if it's going to be open, if it's going to be transparent, if it's going to be fair—all those things that the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane mentioned about transparency and fairness. This bill is absent of those tenets, those principles that we here in Her Majesty's loyal opposition demand from legislation—that they are fair and they are open, transparent and just for all people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^me^ France Gélinas: It's also my pleasure to speak to this extremely important bill. New Democrats have been waiting for a cap-and-trade discussion, I would say, since I was elected. I had the pleasure to sit beside my colleague from Toronto–Danforth, who talks about green energy, I think, in his dreams. He loves this topic and certainly has been talking to our caucus about this for years and years. So am I happy that we finally have a serious, adult discussion about this bill? Absolutely. I'm really happy that I have a chance to put a few things on the record so that we get it right.

Getting it right is quite simple. It means that we will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It's as simple as this. The entire exercise is focused on one thing: How do we reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

One of the ways to do this is through the introduction of this bill, which will introduce a cap-and-trade system. A cap-and-trade system is already in use in other juris-

dictions, and it is part of their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In Ontario, our entire effort will be focused on that. It's a little bit worrisome. That means that it's even more important that we get it right.

How will we know that we have gotten it right? We will know that we have gotten it right because we will be able to measure a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions. We will be able to have a fair, effective and transparent process to look at how much money is being collected, who do we collect this money from and where we are investing it. This is where the fair, the transparent and the effective all come into play.

When we talk about effective, at the end of the day, we have seen other provinces. We don't have to look very far. Let's just look to Quebec right next to us and see how they did. Quebec introduced their own cap-and-trade, which is often mentioned by the Liberal government as an inspiration for what we're doing now. But if you look at what really happened, in 2006, 10 years ago, the Quebec government went on with their action plan. They spent close to $1.6 billion to cut greenhouse gas emissions, and they had given themselves a target. Unfortunately, although the money was collected and the money was spent, they only reached 10% of the original goal that they had given themselves. They had given themselves a specific goal for transportation of merchandise. In that, they reached 8% of their goal. They had given themselves a specific goal for agriculture and food production, forestry, and municipalities, and in those, they reached 1% of the goal that they had given themselves.

So it's not because you gathered money from cap-and-trade and it's not because you invest that money that you are necessarily effective. We will know we are effective when the greenhouse gas emissions go down. This exercise of collecting money from people who produce greenhouse gases and investing into projects that are supposed to reduce them—unless you actually are successful at the end, the entire exercise will be for nothing.

I don't want to miss the boat on this. This is too importance for us to miss the boat on this.

L'Association québécoise de lutte contre la pollution atmosphérique, which is an organization that really looked at what Quebec had done, consider this a fiasco. Quebec failed. They did collect money, like we will, on natural gas, on gas at the pump; they did all of this. Did they invest in projects? Yes, they did. But what really happened was that the money was invested more for political gain than for the end goal. And the end goal, you have to remember, is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. So it has to be effective.

It then has to be fair. I represent one of those big ridings in northeastern Ontario. I have no big municipalities in my riding. I have no mayors. I have no towns. I have none of this. I have 33 little communities, not one of them big enough to have a council. If you think about, "Oh, let's switch to public transit," who are we kidding? There is no public transit in most of the land mass of Nickel Belt. If you live close to the city of Sudbury, yes, some of them can connect to the city of Sudbury public transit. But everybody else—I live in Whitefish; there is no public transit in Whitefish. Beaver Lake, Lake Panache—you ask all the way around: It is just not an option. Will I be paying more for gas? Absolutely. Will I have the option to do something about it? No, Speaker. I'll still have to come here to work, and everybody else who lives in my riding will still have to come to work. When I'm in Toronto, I always use public transit. I love it. It works well. Sometimes it's a little bit busy and doesn't always run as smoothly as I had planned, but it doesn't matter; I use it. I have alternatives. When I'm back home, I do not.

I do know that in northern Ontario, it is a lot colder. I go out of my House and there is four feet of snow. This is where we haven't shovelled. Everywhere else, the snowbanks are 12 feet tall. I get down here, and if there's four inches of snow, it's because there used to be a snowbank there. It is a lot colder. What does that mean? That means that we need to heat our houses. That means that for people on low income, it will mean spending a larger proportion of those low incomes basically on paying for the cap-and-trade.

Why didn't this government do the same thing that BC has done, and that Alberta is about to do, and put in that a part of the money that is collected should be given back to the people in northern and rural communities, where they haven't got a choice, and who are of low income? Why don't we put aside a little bit of those revenues to make sure that people who don't have a choice to take public transit, who live in northern Ontario, where we will spend more on heating because I have four feet of snow in my front yard and you guys have none—why don't we take that into account? That would bring fairness into the equation.

1740

The last part is transparency. This is something that has to happen. My colleague from Essex quoted some of this. Basically, if you have no independent access to these funds, it doesn't matter if you do the best job possible; there will be people who will doubt. If you don't have the facts and figures in front of everybody so they can see where the money went, some people will doubt it.

We cannot afford to fail on this program, Speaker. Too much is on the line. We have to be successful. We have to have a cap-and-trade system that will bring down the greenhouse gases. It has to succeed. In order for this to succeed, it has to be transparent. We have to see the money coming in, we have to see the money going out and we have to be able to measure that we actually decreased the amount of greenhouse gases.

In other jurisdictions, and I will refer to Quebec again, Clean Energy Canada summarized their findings by saying that they question the transparency of the green fund expenditures, noting that this money often serves "highly political objectives." I don't want a report in Ontario that says the same thing. I want to prevent this. How do we prevent this? We use the officers of this Legislature to give us transparency into what happened.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm just going to be very short, Mr. Speaker. Let's just take what we're doing and the importance of a cap-and-trade system because of the $1.9 billion in proceeds. You're going to need that money, particularly in rural and northern Ontario, because that program is going to go into that person's house to help them with their heating and cooling system to make it net zero. It's going to be, as technologies emerge—and there's a limited number of them right now—to get them hybrid and electric vehicles to reduce their emissions so that they're paying less at the pump, so that they're not using fossil fuels. That's the whole point of this program, and it's our ability to deploy that. That's why we need the proceeds; that's why we support a cap-and-trade system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm pleased to join in the debate, and I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt for her comments. As someone who represents a rural riding, I agree with her that residents in ridings like mine that don't have a transit system, where there's no way to get from Westport to Cardinal or from Kemptville to Gananoque—there's just not that infrastructure to get them there.

But it was very interesting: A while ago, Kevin O'Leary wrote the Premier an open letter. I was fascinated by the letter, so I actually filed an order paper question, order paper question 625, and I'll read it into the record. It says:

"Enquiry of the ministry: Will the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change commit to providing, on a quarterly basis, the following information regarding the cap-and-trade system: statements of revenue into and expenditures out of the cap-and-trade fund; details on the number of government employees hired to administer the program; audited information on the current valuation of the government's investments in the green tech sector; and data showing progress made on reducing ... emissions."

I filed that on March 2. I hope that part of the debate—and I'm glad that the minister is here. Maybe he would respond to some of that open letter that Mr. O'Leary, a citizen who's getting quite a lot of publicity lately—that maybe he would respond to that. He's smiling at me, so I think maybe he's interested in providing the answer.

I just want to say again that I think that my leader, Patrick Brown, has stated very clearly that this can't be a cash grab. There has got to be revenue neutrality to what the government—this can't just be a slush fund to spend on their scandal, waste and mismanagement over the last 13 years.

Mr. Grant Crack: Aw, Steve.

Mr. Steve Clark: They can heckle me all they want, but I think that's what Ontarians want. They want to make sure this isn't a slush fund for more—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Mr. Steve Clark: —scandal and mismanagement.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Before I continue, I'd just like to remind all members in the Legislature that the use of an electronic device is not permitted within the Legislature itself—not to suggest that it has been used, but it could have been used, and I'm just sending out that reminder to all.

Mr. Steve Clark: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I apologize that I read from an electronic device a document that is easily available both in electronic and written form.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That was a point of order. You are allowed to correct your record.

Now back to questions and comments. The member for Essex.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My colleague from Nickel Belt highlighted a lot of concerns that she's already hearing from her communities and her constituents. It's been reiterated by our colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I think members in the chamber will have a whole variety of questions that they are going to need to answer for their communities. It gives me this terrible feeling that at some point this government might bring in time allocation on this bill. I hope you don't do that, for a whole host of reasons.

Number one is that there are a lot of questions that need to be answered.

Number two is, I'm looking forward to hearing what they are going to say over there. The more time you give them, the more we may be able to parse out some form of rational thought around what the official opposition thinks around the issue of climate change and what they would do. I'm looking forward to that as well. But I think it adds to the debate.

Here are a couple of questions for the minister, and I'm pleased to see him, as always, in the House.

The minister may appoint a public servant—or other persons, i.e. not public servants—as a director to administer and to enforce the act. The minister may delegate their authority to a public servant or other persons, and the director may delegate their authority to a public servant or other person, meaning that person is going to be at arm's length or outside of the parameters of oversight of this House. That's concerning to me. We certainly don't want to outsource such an enormous responsibility in term of ensuring that we're meeting targets. So please answer that question for me.

There's another one: The bill doesn't refer to any need for data or economic outlook analysis to be considered when developing the action plan. How are you going to know or how do we know right now, which you should have—you should be launching those experts to tell us what that economic impact is going to be on the whole host of industries in the province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I appreciate the opportunity to speak today. I want to start by thanking the Minister of

the Environment for his leadership on this file, because there's no question that this is a complicated file. I'm listening to the opposition on both sides, and there are questions, obviously, that I think affirm the fact that it is an actual complicated file.

I have two girls, and I was telling the Minister of the Environment that we were out a few weeks ago, two Sundays ago, and it was so warm that my daughter just had a T-shirt on. I said, "You've got to put on a coat." She says, "I'm sweating here." Then the next day, we're in a blizzard. I keep sending pictures to the Minister of the Environment. I sent him a picture of strawberries that were growing in December and my garlic that was sprouting in early December, which was just astonishing.

I understand that the job of the NDP and the job of the Conservatives is to criticize and hold us accountable, but we need to work together on this file. It's the only way we're going to get it right.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Nickel Belt for final comments.

M^me^ France Gélinas: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the member from Essex, the member from Leeds–Grenville and the two ministers for their comments.

The comments from the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change: I too believe that things will change for the better, that new technology will roll out that will lead us towards way less dependence on a carbon-burning-type of a culture and environment, but we are not there yet. The people in my riding will start to pay 4.7 cents more on gas on January 1. In nine short months, they will start to pay. But it will be a long time before the people of Nickel Belt have the $150,000 they need to buy an electric car—not that there would be anywhere to plug it in in Nickel Belt, if you had $150,000 to spend on such a thing. I would be really happy to get the $6,000 rebate, but, really, it feels like this is not for us.

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Remember that there are people in northern Ontario. We care about the environment. I come from Sudbury. We had an environmental disaster before people cared about the environment. Do you remember the black rocks? Do you remember that we cut down all the trees so that we can smelt our metal into the open air? It pretty much killed everything living, including humans. Then we learned and we planted trees, we regreened and we did all of this and we will continue to do this because we care about our environment. But you have to help us in the transition because the burden of cost on the people in northern Ontario—especially low-income people—will be hard.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I have about 10 minutes, and it'll be hard to do all this in 10 minutes.

I just want to say a few things very quickly to the members from Essex, Windsor–Tecumseh and my friend from Nickel Belt. What keeps me up at night is that we have 30 years, if you look at the work that came out of the IPCC last week that says we're already at the guardrail: It's not even 1.5 degrees really; we have less than one degree left. That's no flexibility.

If you look at the momentum of the carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere, we're now dealing with impacts from before I was born. We have momentum for 50 or 60 years of impacts. Ontario in the south will already be four degrees warmer; in the north, in your communities, it'll be eight degrees Celsius warmer. We're not sure we can even survive that.

I don't think the enormity of this challenge has been fully internalized yet by this Legislature. But I want to thank you because I think you're speaking to all of us in the terms of the reality and the soberness we need.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with some of the issues—I've talked before about this—about why a cap-and-trade system and what our disagreement is with the opposition. A carbon-pricing system, as the Leader of the Opposition would suggest, that does not have a cap and does not have the market mechanisms—the member for Simcoe–Grey is here. The $160 a tonne is Mark Jaccard's number. It was a study done from a policy journal that said that to get to 14% below 1990 levels, which is the federal target, that would be the price per tonne, and it would have to jump over a period of time by $10 a year.

Our target in Ontario—we're already at about 7%—is 37%. We chose a cap-and-trade system because we all need to understand the differences here. We're debating two visions. The Tory vision and the Liberal vision are very different, and I think that probably the New Democratic vision and ours are much more aligned.

A capped decline rate guarantees your reductions. We will, if we pass this bill, meet our 2020 targets, a 4.17% decline rate. We're not relying on price. That's why, at a market level in a bigger market with California and Quebec, which is the fifth-largest economy in the world, that large stable market and capped decline rate keep the price down, right? So the price at the pump will be much lower than if you had to do it with the BC model that some people talk about, a revenue-neutral tax. Our emissions have been going down in Ontario because we had another, what's called, implicit fee, which was the coal plant closures. You can't do them again. There aren't any more coal plants to close. It's now about cars and it's now about houses because our industry is coming down.

Why allowances? Why that kind of system? Well, if you work at Essar Steel or you're working at Vale Inco or you're working in Sarnia at any one of the fuel centres, there is a limited amount of technology that's available. Again, if we did what the Leader of the Opposition suggested and that kind of model, we'd end up with what happened in BC where the cement plants left and those people lost their jobs. BC now imports its cement, with a huge carbon footprint, from China.

The British government does something called dematerialization of their economy. I hope the member from Simcoe–Grey is listening, because I don't understand how a Conservative in Canada would disagree with a Conservative in the UK. Under their system, they actually dematerialized their economy. They lost all 17 steel mills. We are not prepared to lose industry over this.

While every industry in some way is paying, and a small minority of the heavy emitters get transitional allowances, that's to protect the jobs. We're not just doing this for big business. Who's out advocating for this? Not just the industry associations but Unifor and the people who represent the workers in that plant. Does that mean that they're going to be reduced? Absolutely, but Michigan and Illinois are not in a carbon pricing system yet. We cannot disadvantage our workers and our economy around that. At the same time, we have to achieve our reductions. We think the cap-and-trade system does it.

Again, where I think we would probably agree with the NDP and disagree with the Conservatives is I think there's nothing more insane than a revenue-neutral carbon pricing system. Why? The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke attacked the government this morning. He said, "If you don't extend these programs to subsidize retrofits, you're abandoning rural Ontario," and he threw his papers down on the desk with great drama, as he often does. Where does he think the money is coming from for the existing retrofit programs for natural gas and oil and propane? The exact point of the member from Nickel Belt: We can't expect my Aunt Anne in Wanup, who is 96 years old on a fixed income, to change out her fossil fuel heating system. She's a constituent. My Aunt Anne is going to need several thousand dollars in a grant program for the same reason we heard the drama from the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. Why? Because we have to take the money from the polluters—which is why it's a regulatory fee—and give it to those constituents, working- and middle-class families, who can't do it.

Why do we have $14,000 subsidies on electric vehicles? Because if you're buying the crossover and if you have to drive one of those big Fords or one of those big Tahoes, there is now technology that is comparative. Within a year or two, we will see major new technologies, hopefully being made in Windsor, if we're lucky, because we're pushing very hard and we have an advantage now with this. You need a $14,000 subsidy if you live in northern Ontario for that big truck, so you need the $1.9 billion.

I am totally confused by the Leader of the Opposition, whose critic on Thursday attacked the government and said, "Do not have any kind of carbon tax; do not put a price on carbon." I have her entire speech here. Her lead-off speech was, "Don't support this bill. Don't support a price on carbon."

I can tell you that the only thing that's changed since last week was the polls. They figured out what the New Democrats and the Liberals know, which is that you can't form a government in Ontario unless you're on the right side of the carbon pricing issue. That's the only thing that's changed.

How do you attack Stéphane Dion? How do you run in elections after elections? Do you know the speeches I've gotten from the member from Nipissing, from Huron–Bruce and the way through the caucus? They weren't even neutral. I have pamphlets that were put out after I got elected in 2005 because I wrote columns for years in the Toronto Star saying that a carbon price was essential. The Tory's election literature against me was recirculating my columns from the Star in my constituency. This is how rabidly anti-carbon pricing you were.

If we're a little askance or concerned—I don't know whether you're going to come out for the nationalization of banks next. That would be a bigger flip-flop for you guys. But how you—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We have four carbon trading systems.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Who did the first carbon trading with Hydro One 16 years ago?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You guys did. You did, my friend. So why aren't you supporting it?

Mr. Jim Wilson: It wasn't mature enough and it was full of scandal back then.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, if I could have the floor. Thank you.

The $1.9 billion: Where does that money go? I want my friend from Lanark to be very clear about this so that I can answer your colleague's question. All of this has to go, by law and by demand, into GHG reductions. We are actually holding ourselves to a higher standard. We have a specific line. We not only have to report where it goes; we have to demonstrate the GHG reductions.

Mr. Speaker, $1.9 billion may sound like a lot of money, but go up on top of the CN Tower. You can't see a lot of Ontario there, but you can see enough buildings, and if you do the math on how many people you can see and how many of those old houses in Riverdale and in the Annex need to be retrofitted, $1.9 billion is barely going to cut it.

We can't raise taxes. We cannot use this money to subsidize it, but we do have to absorb all of the other costs of climate change from our other sources of revenue. When we lost eight metres of GO track, it cost us $600 million. When Burlington's stormwater system, because of new precipitation levels—a lot more rain, a shorter amount of rain but greater volume, destroyed their sewer system, three times destroyed our operating rooms. Where is the money coming from for that, Mr. Speaker? It's coming from existing revenues. It doesn't appear in our budget debates. You don't see the insurance industry, which has been losing money—you have to actually account for that.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Hurricane Hazel happens every 100 years. It's a 100-year storm.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Now a 100-year storm event is a 10-year event; a 10-year event is an annual event. The costs of that are being absorbed by municipalities, hospitals and municipal governments.

Anyone who says it's revenue-neutral—they're saying revenue-neutral to government. We're making it revenue-positive to our constituents, for the same people in Nickel Belt who have to replace that. If it's revenue-neutral to government, then there's no money for them. They can't replace it.

We need it to be revenue-positive for Ontarians, which is why the polluter-pays principle is so important. Those large polluters will pay. The ones that are trade-exposed and carbon-intensive, as our friends Jerry Dias and others have pointed out, need that transition. Are they getting a free ride? No. The vast majority—almost all of them—are paying, except for a very few, and it's transitional. Are we working with unions and industries to get the plans in place so they can get the technology in place to stay competitive and lower their emissions? But revenue-neutral? Not revenue-neutral for our constituents. It would be a pain in the neck for them if the Tories got their way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): There is not time for questions and comments. That will be at a later point in time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I beg to inform the House that in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to a certain bill in her office.

The Deputy Clerk (Mr. Todd Decker): The following is the title of the bill to which Her Honour did assent:

An Act to amend various statutes with respect to sexual violence, sexual harassment, domestic violence and related matters / Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne la violence sexuelle, le harcèlement sexuel, la violence familiale et des questions connexes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): As it is now 6 o'clock or a few moments after, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1803.

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